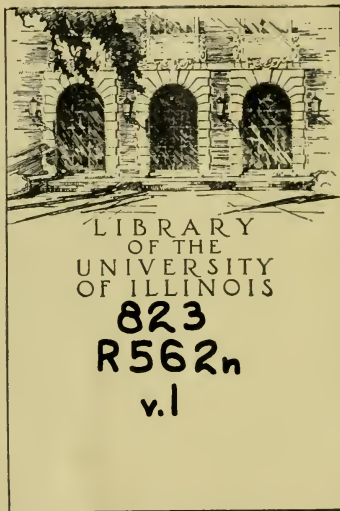
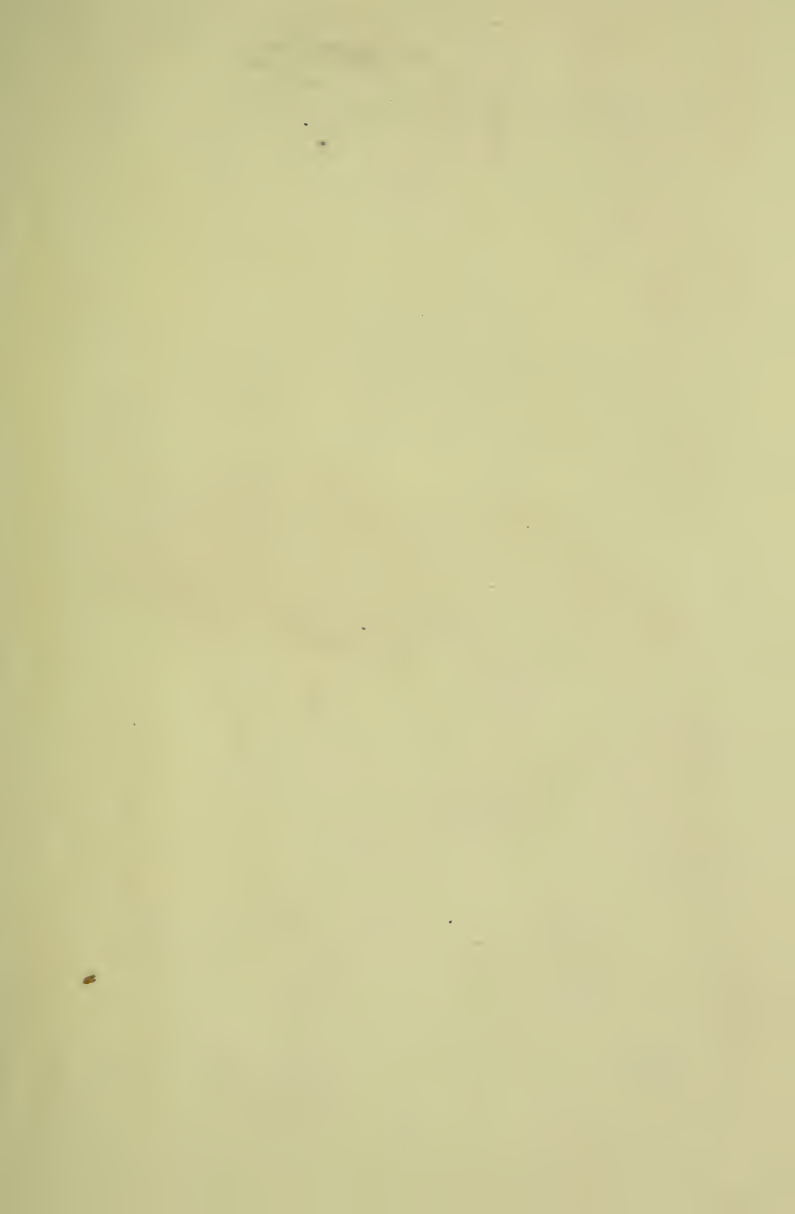


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NO MAN'S FRIEND.

BY

FREDERICK WILLIAM ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF "GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY;" "MILLY'S HERO;" "MR. STEWART'S
INTENTIONS;" ETC., ETC.

"I exist,
Within myself, not comfortless."

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

WESTBOURNE-ON-SEA.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE ELVANI FAMILY	3
II. THE VISITORS' LIST	13
III. THE REGATTA AT WESTBOURNE-UPON-SEA	34
IV. MR. RANWICK AT HOME	67
V. MR. SEARLE	91
VI. FRIENDLY, OR UNFRIENDLY	106
VII. SURVEILLANCE	127
VIII. PAVES THE WAY FOR MANY CHANGES	142
IX. MR. HARLAND'S ULTIMATUM	161
X. THE ELVANI FAMILY IS BROKEN UP FOR EVER	174

BOOK II.

D A M A R I S.

I. MR. HARLAND IS HIMSELF AGAIN	193
II. MRS. COURTENAY TELLS THE NEWS	213

CHAP.	PAGE
III. DAMARIS	230
IV. TWO HOMES	243
V. INQUISITIVE PHILOSOPHY	266
VI. DAMARIS'S CHARACTER DEVELOPS ITSELF	294
VII. COURTENAY'S LOVE SUIT	312

BOOK I.

WESTBOURNE-ON-SEA.

NO MAN'S FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

THE ELVANI FAMILY.

THEY came into the old town of Westbourne at eleven o'clock at night. The clocks in the new town—that of Westbourne-upon-Sea, a mile and a quarter distant—had already struck eleven; but then Westbourne-upon-Sea was a modern, fast, go-a-head place, and not to be relied upon. The bells began chiming the hour in the old turret of Westbourne Church as the Elvanis—father, mother, and daughters—tramped into the town, slowly, erratically, and with heads butting against the wind and rain which had been in their faces all the way, like adverse fates.

They had walked their two-and-twenty miles, those four fragments of society; and the rate at

which they had walked, together with the journey and the stormy nature of the day, had told upon them, and rendered them grateful for the first sight of the town, and the flecks of light, here and there, in the windows of cottagers and townsfolk who were up late that night.

The father of the family in a ragged great-coat, too small for him, but a world too wide, stalked on in advance, clutching a something to his breast, that looked like a wooden baby in a green baize bag; and glancing behind now and then at her who came more slowly in his wake, and whom he might be guiding by the sparks which the wind blew across the darkness from the short pipe he held between his teeth.

Following him the mother of the family—the Signora Elvani of public life—a woman who seemed to have been made to match her husband, so gaunt and angular was her outline in the shadows. She too carried a rigid substance in green baize, which she clutched with equal tenacity to her breast, and even screened with a portion of that scanty shawl which might have more profitably covered her chest from the cold. She looked behind occasionally

at those who loitered in her rear, as her husband looked at her.

Ten yards in the background at least, followed the elder daughter, an attenuated child in a squelched bonnet, a short ragged frock, black stockings, and old boots down at heel, a girl evidently lame and footsore, and over-weighted with a bundle of "properties" which was slung across her right shoulder, and to which she clung with two thin, bony hands.

Five yards from her, the junior member of the family, evident by her stature even in that murkiness of atmosphere; a child that had also something in green baize to carry, and was also spare of form, poorly clad, down at heel, and lame..

"I said that we'd do it by eleven, Caroline," said the man in advance, without removing his pipe from his mouth; "and there it strikes from Westbourne Church, by jingo! Where are the girls?"

"They're coming on. Damaris," she said, looking over her shoulder, "are you there?"

"I'm here, safe enough. Is this Westbourne?"

"Yes."

"Thank God for it then, for I'm dead beat,"

said the child; "here's Eunice with more life than I have. Why, she's singing now!"

"There's much to sing about just now, I *must* say," said Mrs. Elvani, with emphasis. "Come on, you two!"

On into the old town accordingly, keeping to the middle of the road in preference to a footpath of flints, neatly laid enough, but not choice walking for people with tender feet; turning suddenly to the left, away from the broader thoroughfare, and into a narrow street smelling of imperfect drainage, stopping for a moment to collect their forces together, and then toiling one after another up the steep and time-worn steps that led into the 'Ship' inn.

Time was when the 'Ship' had been a respectable place and frequented by respectable people; many years ago that was, however, before physicians talked too much about the purity of air and mildness of climate peculiar to Westbourne, and speculative gentlemen ran up their rows of terraces on the great cliffs facing the sea, and hotels were found to pay in the new town. Then the 'Ship' had no more visitors, and even fourth-rate commercial

travellers took their samples of groceries and patent-medicines to other quarters less saline and low. Saline—for the Westbourne boatmen lived in the old town still, which appeared to have gone further inland and out of the way, as though ashamed of its dashing neighbour and namesake; and these boatmen clung to the ‘Ship,’ and smoked long pipes in its grimy parlour, and swore a good deal when times were hard and fish were scarce. Low, very low indeed for a quarter of the year—for it was the only house-of-call for tramps, that had a connection with tramps, and where tramps for the nonce might consider themselves at home. So the ‘Ship’ had lost caste, and had it not been for the antiquity of the thing, and the tact of the landlord, would have lost its licence with its former dignity. For they quarrelled at the ‘Ship’ not unfrequently, and when rival itinerants met in the tap-room in the season, the place was resonant with altercation until they turned into the stable-yard and settled differences by force of arms.

There was no doubt that the place was full enough on that particular night in August on which our story opens. The door of the tap-

room, and the windows of the tap-room were open, the tobacco smoke was thick and dense despite the thorough draught, and before one grew accustomed to the atmosphere, it was difficult to distinguish through the fog the faces or figures of the people who talked so loudly and volubly, and hammered so noisily their beer-mugs on the table.

"What Elvani, and the old woman, and the lot o' you!" exclaimed the landlord, emerging into the passage as the wayfarers came up the steps, "blest if I can stow you anywhere, upon my soul."

"Full?"

"Chock full to busting—everybody's come to Westbourne this Regatta time, and you won't get the pull like you did last year, my boy."

"Perhaps not," said Elvani, nodding, "but we've our connection, and it will stand by us, I'll be bound! We shan't go to the wall without an effort of our own, for there's talent in us, Jones, and principle, and style."

"Ah," replied Jones, "I will say that myself, though I'm no judge of style, and likes the comic business best, and b'lieves it pays best

in the long run. You'll find a corner, I daresay, to stow yourselves in for an hour, but there's no room to sleep you anywheres. A wet night, Mrs. Elvani; up to business the night-afore, like a woman of business as you are, my dear."

"Ah! yes!" said Mrs. Elvani, rather wearily, and without paying any heed to the familiar peroration of the landlord. "Let us come in and sit down."

"We've walked forty miles if we've walked a step to-day," said Mr. Elvani, "and the old lady's tired."

"Two-and-twenty by the last milestone," corrected his wife.

"Oh! two-and-twenty was it?" said he, easily. "Ah! but then we missed our way twenty times at least, and as misses are as good as miles, why that makes forty-two, eh, Jones?"

Jones condescended to laugh at this stale joke.

"Dashed if you ain't allers in spirits, guv'nor. Go in and cheer them up a bit, they're as sulky as bears about the wet. They don't take things kindly, they don't do credit to the house;

they don't drink as they ought. They're as scaly a lot," he added, behind his hand, "as ere I seed come into a man's parlour."

"And you'll turn me and my family, old customers and good ones, Jones," said Mr. Elvani, with consummate tact, "you'll turn us into the wet and windy streets for a lot of new-fangled nondescripts that don't thank you for your hospitality. Jones, it's unfriendly, to say the least of it."

"Well, look a-here; we're blazing full, but you can keep the place you settles down in; there's the loft over the stables for the missus and young uns if they like it better. And it's not everybody that I'd let go into my loft, with hens there, and new laid eggs seven a shilling, strike me dead!"

"Jones, you're a good fellow. A mug of ale, a quartern of gin, a big loaf, some cheese, a clean pipe, and a screw, old boy. Hollo! you girls. Why they've gone to sleep on the doorstep, both of them, side by side like a couple of paroquets. Hi Eunice! hi Damaris!"

The girls, tired out by their father's loquacity, had seated themselves on the top step, and were fast asleep with their bundles in their laps.

“Do you want to catch your death of cold, and be no good in the morning, Damaris?” said the father, when the eldest girl was awake and standing by him; “upon my word, girl, you should be more careful of the consequences.”

“To catch cold, and die and be buried somewhere near the place where the clock strikes. I don’t fancy, father, that I should care, or that anybody else would,” she added with a short laugh, “for it’s hard lines.”

“Hard lines!” repeated the father, “that is a vulgar phrase; who taught you that?”

“You did.”

“A slangy phrase which I have picked up in low company somewhere, and which I should not have repeated,” remarked her father; “don’t say it again, Damaris,—it jars! You’re cold.”

“As a stone.”

“Come into the warm room and have a little ale with some gin in it, you’ll not talk of being buried then.”

Father and daughter passed into the tap-room, whither Mrs. Elvani and the youngest born had preceded them, after Eunice had been also reprimanded in her turn for her

carelessness,—her wickedness in trying to kill herself in that way!

“Do you want to die and leave *no one* to care for me?” the mother had said with a half-jealous cry; “sitting on wet stones, you foolish thing, you.”

“Die, mother! I want to live to be sure. To live with you, and Damaris, and——, and father, when he don’t drink!”

“Who says he drinks?”

“They talk about him—wherever we go—a little.”

“Oh! a little. And he only drinks a little, mind you! And that’s when we have been in luck’s way, and his spirits are good. How the smoke makes one’s eyes water, Eunice; everything right in the bag, girl?”

“Quite right,” had been the sharp answer as they entered the tap-room or bar-parlour of the ‘Ship,’ and plunged into the cloud-land which met them there.

It was evident that Signor and Signora Elvani had each a favourite daughter.

CHAPTER II.

THE VISITORS' LIST.

IT was a heterogeneous company assembled in the tap-room of the 'Ship' that night. The eve of the Regatta at Westbourne-on-Sea had brought together all the strange nomadic atoms peculiar to regattas, and to those festivities which lure a sight-seeing public towards them. When the Elvani family had settled down—which they did with considerable difficulty—and had become accustomed to the apartment and the smoke within it, they had leisure to take stock of their companions, to recognize, and to be recognized by, many wanderers like themselves.

There were the eternal Ethiopians, six in number—men whom they had met at the races last week, and at a fair the week before; and there were an opposition lot, who had turned up unexpectedly at the 'Ship' also, and were at

daggers drawn with the first comers. There had been an effort, earlier in the evening, to make things pleasant, and buy off the superfluous itinerants—but the effort had ended in personalities and one fight in the skittle-ground; and there were a dozen blackguards, with sooty complexions, ready to overstock the market's demand for blackguards in the morning. It might have been a pleasant evening, if it had not been for these opposing elements of discord, who sat glancing at each other like imps of darkness, and ready at a word to make a general *mêlée* of it.

The Italian with his monkey had come the night before, having made a mistake in the day, and the two were fast asleep in the corner, brothers-in-arms, the taller one with his head on the organ. There were a couple of acrobats, haggard-looking beings, who had retired into private life, and whose fleshings were drying before the kitchen-fire downstairs; and there were four Germans, with three brass instruments and a drum, and these had represented all the "professional" class until the arrival of the Elvanis, at whom three-fourths of the profession swore as at a fresh intrusion. But the

room, which was a very long, barn-like place, was crowded with the Westbourne boatmen, and by boatmen who had come from various places round the coast to compete with them, and were waiting for their boats by the first early train to-morrow, heavy-booted, bronze-faced men, who regarded the "profession" curiously, and smoked long clay-pipes, and talked of little else but their crafts, the voyages made in them, and the races won in past regattas. Throw in a blind man and his dog—a man who was really blind, or who thought it policy to keep up the delusion even when off duty; and a man and woman who intended to sell cards of the Regatta in the morning, and the reader has all the select company at the 'Ship' before him.

"Well, there's enough on us now, at any rate," grumbled one of the negro melodists, "all in the musical line too, barring you coves," nodding at the acrobats—"and I've no doubt we shall have half-a-dozen more in the morning. Who'd a thought of you lot turning up with yer ting-tang stuff at this out-of-the-way place."

"The more the merrier, Barnes," said Mr. Elvani, cheerfully.

Mr. Barnes did not see that. Mr. Barnes d'd all the more that came to add to the merriment and take their share in the superfluous cash that might be afloat next morning. Mr. Barnes was argumentative also, and spoke contemptuously of Westbourne-on-Sea, and the second Regatta that ever the beggarly (here he d'd again with considerable volubility) watering place had been able to afford.

"Oh, but look here, Barnes, I spotted this place first," said Elvani. "I was here last year before you fellows thought of it. I've been here five summers for a fortnight at a time."

"More fool you," said Barnes.

Mr. Elvani said complacently that he had made it pay, and Mr. Barnes told him that he was a liar.

"And if you make it pay to-morrow, blarm me," cried Barnes; "for if we don't drown you with the row we make, I'm a Dutchman."

"If you don't make less row now, some of you chaps 'll get shot out of winder," cried an indignant boatman. "What do you keep growling about, you quarrelsome beggar, you? Hasn't Mr. Elvarnish as much right as you

to the town? Blessed if he don't behave better in it, at any rate."

"Who's talking to you?" growled Barnes.

"Thank you, Mr. Wads. I drink your health; and here's a toast with it. Live and let live!" said Elvani.

"But, damn it, you won't let us live!" cried Barnes.

"In my line and after my fashion," continued Elvani, "I try to be respectable and to please respectable people. I shall not interfere with *your* connection, Mr. Barnes."

"Why do you keep talking to the fellow?" said his wife at this juncture. "Can't you let him rail on and take no notice?"

"My dear, we are not to be put down by sham niggers and their Seven Dials vulgarisms. On our own ground too, Westbourne-upon-Sea."

"The girls are asleep. Will you let them sleep or not?" asked Mrs. Elvani, querulously.

"My dear—by all means. But their supper?"

"Ah! better have their supper and go to bed in earnest perhaps, in the loft," said Mrs. Elvani; "we shall be poisoned with this

tobacco else. Eunice—Damaris—don't sleep there!"

"Nice names them," said the incorrigible Barnes to his neighbour, "almost swell names, and suits swells who don't like vulgarity. Seen better days, you lot o' course. Kept a carridge and pair, p'raps, and did the nobby in Rotten-row."

"At least, Mr. Barnes, we—"

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Elvani, pulling her husband by the sleeve; "is this a place to brag of what we have been, or what we might have been, if the drink had not got hold of you?"

"Got hold of me!" cried Mr. Elvani, in mild surprise. "Well, that's a good one; and I have known when to stop all my life. Caroline, you are severe."

"Bread and cheese, please," said Mrs. Elvani. "It's late already; and these men will sit here all night."

"Ah, bread and cheese—there, my dear, your favourite crust."

The Elvanis declined further argument for the present, and paid attention to their supper. The customers began to thin; those who had

been fortunate enough to secure beds, to go lumbering in their heavy boots upstairs, and those less fortunate to drop off to sleep, one by one, at their tables, leaving but a few restless nomads talking and arguing still.

The smoke began to clear away somewhat, and the Elvanis to become more prominent characters; to loom forth from the mist, as it were, life-portraits for any who cared to study human nature at that hour and in that wretched place. Let us sketch them in outline as they sit there, for they have their parts to play in this story, and they influence many whose time has not come to strut their brief hour before the reader here.

Mr. Elvani, a tall man of forty years or thereabouts, a sallow-faced man, with long hair of an incipient grey, and a ratty moustache of the same hue, to which his hand had a habit of wandering, and of twitching at in a nervous and characteristic fashion. A man very much lined, who had evidently experienced much privation, and did not look the strongest in the world after his hard battle with life; his hard struggle mayhap for the life that was in him still. A thin-faced man with downcast

grey eyes, that robbed his face of a shrewdness that had been natural to it once, and was evident at times still when he looked straight before him, which was not often. A man whose hand shook as he cut his bread and cheese, and who assumed a nonchalant air, as though to hide that little trait of nervousness. For he had been disturbed by Mr. Barnes's comments upon his family's appearance, and was even at that moment cogitating some severe reflections upon Barnes, should that ill-tempered individual annoy him further before the night was out.

His wife was of a more reticent disposition, probably of a character more strong, judging by the upper hand which she had assumed that evening, although *we* will not judge by appearances yet a while. A tall woman, her husband's junior by eight years we may say, though looking as old as he, as tired, as careworn, or timeworn, or both, and as grey. A woman who had fretted more at her position, it was just possible—if the Elvanis had really fallen from a higher estate—one who had resisted every step downward, clinging to the rocks on either side, and setting her back

against the moral impetus which forced her slowly but surely to the lower ground. A woman terribly worn, terribly soured by misfortune, but with strength in her yet to do her day's work with the rest.

And the children? drifting on with father and mother along the same road, parts of the machinery by which money was earned, and the fleeting interest of the lounge awakened. We need draw but little attention to them in this place, they are lay figures for the nonce, and do not live in this chapter. Dark-faced, dark-haired children, both of them, with features so sharpened by poverty, that it was difficult to determine what they might have been under circumstances apart from these. Children with a strong resemblance to each other, albeit the brow of the elder one with the outlandish name, as Mr. Barnes had observed, was more prominent, and seemed to send the eyes further back into the head.

When supper was over it was twelve o'clock. The numbers had considerably thinned in the bar-parlour of the 'Ship,' and there were not more than six wide awake and watchful. Amongst the latter was Barnes, a man great

in the comic line when facing the public with his gang, but brutal and acrimonious at the side scenes of life, as are many of his betters, and with less excuse perhaps. Barnes was still suffering from the appearance of the Elvani family; he had not grown accustomed to their intrusion; he had not expected them at Westbourne, and he felt the disappointment acutely. By his side a companion, also one of the wakeful few, smoking a short pipe after the usual fashion, and regarding the Elvanis with attention as they proceeded to collect their properties together.

"Better all in the loft along with the children and me," said Mrs. Elvani to her husband in a whisper, which did not escape the opposition, however.

"We shan't take anything, mum," said Barnes, ironically; "we're not genteel, but we shan't take any of yer traps."

"I don't know that we're compelled to trust you," replied Mrs. Elvani, shortly. "Come, girls."

"Well, I've heard of imperence and *cheek*," said the man by Barnes's side, who had not hitherto spoken; "but I think that we've had

enuf of it for one night. Hitalians ain't generally so fast in their langwidge, though people who purtend to be air, o' course."

"We don't want to argue any more with you, my friend," said Elvani. "I'm only sorry that our coming here has put you out so much."

"Ah! I daresay you are. Sorry, too, that we know all about you, and that you're about as much a furriner as I'm a black man, Mr. Wooster."

Mr. and Mrs. Elvani did not appear greatly discomfited by the discovery; they were surprised for an instant, then they continued loading their children and themselves with the chattels that they had carried two-and-twenty miles that day.

"Ain't I right about it?" asked Barnes's friend.

"Quite right, my good fellow," said Elvani, cheerfully. "Worcester it is, though how the deuce you found me out puzzles my comprehension. Elvani is a better public name, but Worcester might draw a little more, even now," he added, with a sigh.

"Ah! you was in the sterrups once, and no

mistake. I was a super in the chorus when you were coming the bounce as tenor. Too proud to look upon a feller like me then."

"Proud enuf now, Jack," growled Barnes.

"Too proud of that name to hawk it about the streets, at all events," said Mr. Worcester, whom we will call by his right name from this time.

"And so you were one of the chorus at the Theatre Royal George? I'll be back in a minute, and we'll have a glass together for the sake of auld lang syne."

"That's more sociable," said Jack, "by a long sight. Eh, Barnes?"

"I don't want his glass — I don't want nothing more to do with nobody to-night."

And Barnes, aggrieved at the turn which affairs had taken, curled himself into the hard corner of the wooden settee on which he was ensconced, and proceeded to make an effort to slumber with the rest.

Meanwhile the Worcesters passed from the house to the stable-yard, preceded by the landlord with a lantern, Mrs. Worcester scolding her lord and husband all the way.

"You'll go back and drink with those men

who have insulted us all the evening—you'll let yourself be talked over by them, and make yourself their butt."

"Upon my soul, Caroline, no!"

"Why should we mix with them? We can keep ourselves apart from them, if we like?"

"Certainly we can."

"We're low enough; but we can go lower still."

"Ah! yes—that's true."

"You'll not want any more money to-night?"

"Why, no—that is, we're expected to help the house a little—and if I can't sleep, and we get talking, why we become thirsty, eh! landlord? Ah, ah! the landlord sees the joke."

"You must give your orders afore half-arter twelve, as I locks up the bar, and goes to-bed."

"Exactly. Caroline, my dear, I think sixpence, or a shilling will be sufficient."

"There is sixpence."

"Ahem! thank you," said the recipient.

"Now you go first, and I'll pass up the property. You'll dress first thing to-morrow, all of you."

"Yes."

"The guitars are quite right, and none the worse for the wet. It's dark, but dry now," he

said, looking up at the black sky; "please God, we shall have it fine to-morrow."

"Please God we shall!" murmured the woman, reaching out her hand for the lantern, with which the landlord backed, however.

"Why you'll set the blessed place a fire," said he; "I can't have a light up there."

"I'll put it out directly I've done the children's hair," said Mrs. Worcester, "but I must make them look nice for to-morrow."

"Why didn't you do their 'airs up in the parlour."

"With those wretches to laugh at me and them. Those vile, gin-soddened wretches!" she cried passionately; "not I. Give me the light, and take my word that your stables shall be safe."

"Mrs. Elvani may be trusted with sheet lightning, Jones," observed Mr. Worcester, proudly.

"Well, there's the light," said Jones reluctantly, "and it's ony you lot that would ever get it out of me. But you've been allers on the square, and that suits the 'Ship.' And here's the 'Westbourne Times' of yesterday to curl the young 'uns' hair with."

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," said Mrs. Worcester with more gentleness. "You're kind to us; you know that we haven't been always like this, and you feel for our position."

"That's it, p'raps."

Jones departed, and Mrs. Worcester and the children ascended to the loft by means of a rickety ladder that had been placed there for the purpose. The properties were passed up one and one, Mr. Worcester following promptly with the bundle which the elder girl had carried.

"It's roomy, and the hay smells sweet," said Mr. Worcester, looking round him with his head craned forward to avoid contact with the roof; "upon my honour many worse places than this might be found for honest folk."

"A loft over a stable!" muttered Mrs. Worcester.

"A lodging we can pay for, Caroline," said her husband gently.

"I don't complain. You never hear me complain of my life, Worcester."

"Well, no."

"Only of you sometimes; and you will not get drunk to-night?"

"Drunk ! what on sixpence. Certainly not."

"Bid the children good night then."

"Good night, Damaris my dear," he said, stooping and kissing his eldest daughter. "We settle down here for a week, in the old country place that you like so much. Good night, Eunice."

"Eunice, kiss your father," said Mrs. Worcester.

Eunice raised her thin face at this appeal, and Mr. Worcester kissed her also, and then with a final embrace to his wife, this affectionate father and husband went down the ladder, pushed the ladder after his descent upwards into the loft, and walked across the yard towards the house again.

"Now, if he keeps steady to-night, we may make money in the morning," the wife said, looking after him. She closed the loft door, and sat down on a bundle of hay by the side of her children.

"How quiet you both are to-night," she said, "is anything the matter?"

"Nothing, mother," said Eunice, instantly; "and I'm very tired," sighed the elder sister.

"Eunice doesn't complain," said Mrs. Worcester reproachfully to the latter; "you bigger than she should know better."

"I know that the sooner we all break up and try our luck separately the better, mother," said Damaris; "this doesn't answer."

"Don't talk like that; you were always a dissatisfied girl that nothing contented. Together we can live; we work together, and almost save money at times. You are only trying to make Eunice as dissatisfied as yourself."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort."

"Oh, to-morrow we shall all be as bright as the day," cried Eunice; "we're tired now, and cross."

"There, get to sleep both of you, as soon after your hair is done as you can. Perhaps to-morrow we shall grumble less, all of us. Damaris, curl Eunice's hair whilst I do yours."

This double operation having been successfully performed, and in a short space of time, the children of the strollers were lying with closed eyes upon the hay, and the mother sat a little apart from them and regarded them intently.

“Ah, well,” she said at last, “Damaris may be right enough.”

She took off her bonnet, placed it at her feet, and proceeded to curl her own hair for the morning, tearing off long strips of the ‘Westbourne Times’ wherewith to screw up hair that had been black and glossy in her youth, and that trouble had grizzled at two-and-thirty years of age. This was an operation that took longer than her daughter’s, for she paused between whiles for several minutes, and more than once drew from a deep side-pocket a medicine phial that she uncorked and sipped at the liquid within, which was of a white colour, and had a potent aromatic odour not unlike the gin which had been drunk with the beer at supper-time. But then Mrs. Worcester had appeared to have a horror of gin-drinking, and of people who gave way to that enervating habit. Surely Mrs. Worcester did not preach what she did not perform; and let us hope set a better example than this to him whom she so frequently warned against the evils of intoxicating fluids?

The medicine in the phial had considerably diminished, the candle in the lantern was

burning low, and Mrs. Worcester's hair was not yet thoroughly twisted into curls for the morning. She had paused with one long strip of the 'Westbourne Times' before her, and was looking at it with distended eyes—eyes that, heavy with sleep or with the medicine she had imbibed, had now gathered fresh brightness at the torn list of visitors' names before her.

"This can't be; this is not likely!" she exclaimed, seizing the lantern and holding it and the paper close to her. "He can't have got on in the world like this, while I've been going down. It's a similarity of name—and I'm a fool."

Her hand shook as she dived for her medicine phial again, loosened the cork, and tipped off the rest of the contents. The woman was nervous and excited, and required support in this emergency.

"I've a good mind to go out—to talk to Worcester. I'm—"

The voice of some one singing in the tap-room across the yard cut short her soliloquy, and she listened till the song was finished.

"Ah! that's his voice. He's drinking hard. He has got more money than I fancied; he

shan't collect any more, if I know it. Not to be trusted. God help him and us—not to be trusted!”

She fell asleep after this, and forgot all about her promise to the landlord to extinguish the lantern, with which his generosity had supplied her. She fell asleep with her hands clutching her temples, and pushing her grey hair back, her elbows on her knees, and her whole figure bent forward in a witch-like attitude only a trifle less weird than the distorted shadow flung upon the tiled roof above her. She breathed hard, and muttered in her sleep—even stamped her foot as though in anger against a dream figure that had stolen upon her slumbers to annoy her.

And whilst she slept, the girl Damaris shook herself from the hay, writhed silently towards her and reached out one long thin arm towards that strip of paper which had disturbed her mother's equanimity half-an-hour ago.

She lay with her face close to the lantern, the light within it flickering its last ray, and turned the paper in her hands from one side to another, trying in vain to discover a clue to her mother's past excitement. On one side

news of the day, local news of cricket-matches and boating news, torn down the centre, and with only half the words to guess at; on the other, a long list of the names of people who had arrived during the last week at Westbourne-upon-Sea, together with their addresses, the latter torn in parts like last week's details.

Damaris the inquisitive could not learn anything from the scrap of paper, but she was still studying the mystery when the light went out and baffled her. Then she crept back to her sister's side, put her arms round her, and lay and looked up at the roof, through which the white stars were shining now; fair augury for the later morning.

CHAPTER III.

THE REGATTA AT WESTBOURNE-UPON-SEA.

A BRIGHT sunshiny day, to which hardly the most sanguine had looked forward, and which utterly baffled last night's predictions of "dirty weather" from the most lugubrious. A breeze certainly at sea, curling the waves into crisp white heads in the offing, and making the sailing-boats and luggers dance again, but taken altogether, nothing to complain of and the day's amusements likely to be a great success. For people were curious concerning Westbourne Regattas, which were caviare to the multitude as yet; and Westbourne having a name to earn, and the "shine," vulgarly speaking, to take out of neighbouring watering-places, was working its hardest and using its best endeavours to make a triumph of the whole affair.

A real lord, and ground-landlord of three-fourths of Old Westbourne and seven-eighths of Westbourne-upon-Sea had pledged his name to the Regatta's success, and subscribed liberally to the expenses, and the resident gentry had not been slow with their contributions for the good of the new town, and the pleasure of the visitors who came more thickly every season to this pleasant watering-place.

The flags were flying across the High Street by eight in the morning; the boatmen were already on the beach, preparing, arguing, and gesticulating; the cards of the Regatta were in the hands of the peripatetics who had slept at the 'Ship' last night; men with baskets of fruit and trays of cake seemed to have cropped up in the night, so early were they on the field of action; the German band was already braying before terraces and crescents, working its way, or rather blowing its way, profitably, towards the scene of action; at ten in the morning two excursion trains had brought a fair quota of people from the villages and towns adjacent, and two men in white hats from London; at a quarter past ten all the Westbourne folk who could afford a holiday, and

many who could not, were lining the lower parade—for there were two parades, an upper and a lower, as we shall have occasion to mention presently—and all the dirty little boys and girls in Westbourne were on the beach, riotous and triumphant as youthful natives at such places always are. At half-past ten Westbourne-upon-Sea in all its glory, and the parades crowded with visitors and aborigines; the beach a scene of bustle and confusion, with boats being run down towards the bright water by boatmen in smart guernsies; all the itinerant amusements of the day in full force; two bands of negro melodists, a couple of acrobats, an organ-grinder with a monkey that clashed cymbals and held forth his cap for halfpence, the brass band playing the last sensation song in a variety of keys, and an Italian family, smartly dressed, all hats and feathers, bugles, ribbons, and black cotton velvet, the father and mother playing guitars, the sisters busy with concertina and tambourine, quite a nodding, smiling, and happy family, showing their teeth—they all had good teeth—very much when they sang, which they did with considerable taste and no small

harmony. At a quarter to eleven the umpire—a gentleman connected with the town-council, one of the county magistrates, and a something in the militia—was rowed off to the shaky platform erected twenty yards out at sea, and certainly cast a little ridicule on the whole proceedings by letting the first wave catch him before he could spring into the boat, and cover his boots and trousers to the knees. At eleven o'clock the umpire with several friends upon the platform, the boats in line, or about as much in line as men eager for the first start would allow, the first bang of the little cannon, and the first race commenced. At ten minutes past eleven, on the upper parade, a strange cavalcade making its way toward the scene of gaiety by the gravel path that crossed the lawn in front of an imposing hotel on the cliff.

Two invalids, side by side in Bath chairs, attended by two servants in livery, with wrappers, greatcoats, and telescopes, drawn by a stout old man in a blouse and with a brass ticket on his chest, and by a round-headed, rosy-faced boy in corduroys and big boots;—a cavalcade that attracted general attention, and seemed to be generally recognized as the object of a certain

amount of pity, as it might well be, considering its principal features. The invalids were father and son: the father, a dark-skinned, sloe-eyed man of forty years of age or thereabouts, with a grim expression of countenance that intense pain or a saturnine disposition might have long since made natural to it; the son, a youth of thirteen or fourteen years of age, of a ghastly sallowness, with a leaden shadow underneath the eyes, and white thin hands which, as they lay ungloved upon his lap, looked dead already. A youth of handsome features for all this sickness, or for all the accident that had thus reduced him, but one whose life no insurance company would have bid for, and every wise man of medicine have despaired of. Death in his face, in the strange look-out at sea, even in the very attitude that he had assumed that morning, it was evident.

The Bath chairs were drawn somewhat apart from the general body of sightseers, and twisted and twirled, pulled forward and backed until they were side by side, and fronted the sea. There was a distribution of wrappers round the legs of the sick youth and the throat of the sick man, an adjustment of cushions for

the feet of the latter, the telescope passed from the servant to the hand of the old man in the blouse, who stood ready to pass it to his fare when ordered to do so, and then the hotel menials, taking their way across the parade to the hotel again; leaving father and son to the man and boy hired for the occasion.

"The breeze doesn't feel too strong to-day, Matthew?" asked the sick father of his son.

"No, pa—not at all."

"And you—you don't feel any weaker?"

"I don't know that I do—oh! no."

"A little stronger, perhaps," suggested the father, "change of air works wonders. I walked twelve times across the room myself to-day—twelve times, Matthew."

"I'm very glad to hear it, papa," said the boy, with a sigh. "I wish that I could have given you the same good news; I tried once, and fell."

"Ha! that was imprudent—very foolish—very unwise," said the father, rapidly; "why didn't you wait—make sure—take some one's arm?"

"You might have waited for me, sir," suddenly broke in here the boy in corduroys, "we almost did it last time we tried, sir. I'm just

your height, and we make a tidy match together."

"Mat," called out the old man in the blouse across the width of the two sedans, "don't be too fast with your tongue, my lad,—and just talk to the young gentleman when you're talked to, not afore, young feller. He's much too ready with his gabble, sir,"—this to his own particular charge, the sallow-looking man to whom he played attendant.

"Let him talk. It pleases my son."

"Werry well, sir,—if so be you don't mind, and the young gentleman don't mind, it's not for the likes o' me to interfere. But my Mat's allers extremely howdacious when he's given any liberties. He's as bold a young rascal as ever lived, upon my word, he is."

"Oh! Mat and I get on very well together, Mr. Ranwick," said the mild voice of the youth for whom the old man had evinced so much consideration; "my own age, my own height,—why my own namesake even! I like Mat—why, pa, it always makes me better to hear him laugh."

"Indeed," said the father, somewhat absently.

“Mat, you rascal—laugh directly, sir,” cried Mr. Ranwick.

“I can’t just this minute, grandfather,” answered Mat; “I’ll try presently.”

“Look out for something funny somewhere, sir.”

“All right, sir.”

“If I hadn’t asked him to laugh, he’d a done it in a minute or less,” said his grandfather, in a low soliloquy.

“Your son, I think you said, Mr.—Mr. Ranwick?”

“My grandson, as I’ve said twenty times at least, Mr. Harland,” replied the old man, almost techily, “but you don’t remember—which is bad. His father was one of those big-chested, big-hearted sailor chaps, and he was drowned at sea when Mat was a babby in arms.”

“Ah! yes—I remember something of the story—drowned at sea, eh? very disagreeable indeed—poor man! What’s the time, Ranwick?”

Mr. Ranwick consulted his watch—a large brass one, to discover which required hitching up his blouse, a struggle with a secret receptacle

under his coat and waistcoat, and a general disarrangement of Mr. Ranwick's attire—and informed Mr. Harland that it wanted exactly nine and twenty minutes to twelve.

"Thank you, Ranwick," said Mr. Harland, "and what's on now at sea. Have you a card of the Regatta that you can lend me for a minute?"

"No, I ain't, sir."

"I wonder whether they have one at the hotel," mused Mr. Harland, biting the tip of a black kid finger in his perplexity; "ask your son to go and see for me. And oh!—if they haven't one to spare—he'd better buy one, I suppose; how much, Ranwick, are they likely to be?"

"They ask sixpence and take fourpence, sir," said Master Ranwick, not waiting for his grandfather's more measured reply.

"Pay fourpence then. Here's the money."

But the money was not forthcoming readily. Mr. Harland was slow and methodical in his movements, and took time to find his purse and to disinter therefrom the small silver coin necessary for the purchase of a programme of that day's entertainments.

“There’s fourpence; take care of it, boy; and go to the hotel first, mind, and give them Mr. Harland’s compliments and——curse his impudence, he’s gone.”

This was the first little sign of irritability evinced by the invalid, and he seemed sorry for it, or for the consequence of it, the instant afterwards, and made an attempt to feel his own pulse in a nervous and surreptitious manner.

“Do I look flushed, Ranwick?” he asked shortly afterwards.

“Not a mite, sir. Waxy as ever.”

Mr. Harland looked hard at the wooden, Punch-like features of his guide, who did not appear to think that the remark might be regarded in a personal light.

“I felt a little excited at your son’s impulsiveness. Why can’t he wait till he has heard a message out? I remember something of this before.”

“Oh! Mat’s only sharp, papa,” said his son, apologetically, “sharp as a needle, is he not, Mr. Ranwick?”

“Sharp as lightning; and now he’s gone, Mr. Harland, I will say as good-hearted a lad as

ever breathed—as noble a boy as you'll find 'twixt this and Lunnon."

"He's a good fellow," said Master Harland, looking after Mat, who was running across the grass plot, and taking a flying leap over the iron hurdles by way of finale. "I wish that I were only half as quick!"

"I wish, Matthew, that we could put you in his place, and him in yours, and give this man here a thousand pounds for the exchange."

"Good Gord, Mr. Harland!" ejaculated the old chairman, "I wouldn't take twenty thousand down on the nail now, here on this blessed cliff. I don't think—I don't think," he said, shaking with excitement, "that you ought to wish my grandson, poor man's child as he is, so near his grave as that!"

"His grave!" screamed Mr. Harland, "hush, sir! How dare you! you forget yourself; it isn't true, a thought of it. How dare you forget your place, and talk to me like this! Matthew," turning to his son with anxiety, "you did not hear what this foolish old man said—did you?"

"Yes. He's right, papa; and I daresay he thinks as much of Mat, as you of Matthew.

He only said *near* his grave, you know, and it has been a narrow escape for me."

"Ah! an escape, yes—*away from it!*" said Mr. Harland, subsiding into quiescence. "What's the time, Ranwick, now?"

Mr. Ranwick again struggled with his attire, hitched up his blouse, unbuttoned his coat and waistcoat, and hauled his watch up from the depths.

"It wants nigh on a quarter to twelve, sir."

"I thought that it was later. What a time it will be before luncheon, to be sure. Hollo!" with a little start, "what's that for?"

"That's a gun; the Saucy Jane has won the race, sir! Dashed if I didn't think it would! I backed it with Joe Stubbs for half-a-crown. It's the blue flag, and blue's in fust!"

"You're an old man to risk so much money in that fashion," said Mr. Harland, coldly; "you should know better at your age. Do you bring your son up to betting too?"

"Lor' bless you—he knows nothink of this, o' course. I keeps all my bad examples from that boy, sir."

"That's sensible. No, my good man, I've

nothing to give away. I never give a penny to people in the streets."

The applicant for charity was a negro melo-dist with a tambourine before him, half filled with coppers from a generous public.

"No objection to silver, your honour, and will bring the change correct next Regatta time."

Mr. Harland shook his head; his grim features did not relax a muscle at this weak effort of pleasantry.

"I hope you won't object to a trifle, your honour," the man persisted.

"I've not heard anything of your music, and I don't want to hear any."

"We've been singing loud enough to stun yer, too," said the man, "and if you'd only said so afore, we'd a gone somewhere else, guv'nor."

"Ranwick, see if there's a policeman handy. I can't bear this fellow bellowing in my ears. I haven't come here to be insulted by such mountebanks as these."

"S'pose you come here to be looked at, yer half-baked old skin-flint," cried the man; "s'pose you'd like a little forrin' music from

them people there, who only take sixpences; s'pose you'd—"

The nigger melodist passed behind the chairs, doubled, came back again, and slipped from the upper parade to the lower before a member of the Westbourne constabulary had reached the scene of altercation and was able to recognize the disputatious Barnes.

"It's always the way on such vulgar days as these," said Mr. Harland, peevishly; "why cannot these wretches be stopped coming into the town at all?"

"It's an odd living, but I s'pose they must get it, if they can," said Mr. Ranwick, drily.

"They need not get it here; there are plenty of places about. And at all events they need not come to me. That's their artfulness, for they see how ill I am. Here's another, by God!"

Mr. Harland had evidently been a passionate man in his day, for one thin hand closed upon a stick that was in the Bath chair with him, as though to inflict summary chastisement upon the next suppliant approaching him.

Mr. Ranwick intercepted the progress of the man with the organ and monkey, and thus

allowed Mr. Harland to subside again. By this time Master Ranwick, almost breathless with running in search of the Regatta card, reappeared upon the scene.

"There's the card, sir. Well, Master Harland, how have you been since I saw you last?" he asked familiarly.

The sick lad smiled.

"Oh, very well. What a time you have been away though!"

"Well, I've been having a bit of a brush with Joe Edwards, who has been chaffing me about this Bath-chair business, and I can't stand chaff. I don't think he'll come any of his nonsense again though."

"Tell me all about it," said young Harland; "a regular fight was it—and you won?"

"Yes, I always win," was the conceited answer. "I knew that I should soon settle *him*! This is how it all began."

Mr. Harland listened also for awhile, thinking it strange that his delicate son should take an interest in the boy's prowess, and be amused by a recapitulation of the details of a street skirmish. Still his son had been a bold boy himself before the illness came, and then the

accident ; he was glad in his heart that his son could find an interest in the story ; it was a good sign, and had the idea suggested itself to him—which it did not, for he was not a prayerful man—he would have thanked God for it.

Old Mr. Ranwick was struck with the inconsistency of the whole thing, however.

“Can’t you talk—if you must talk—about something else, Mat ?”

“Let them be,” said Mr. Harland, “it amuses my son.”

Meanwhile the Regatta continued ; the crowd grew denser on the lower parade and beach, and the numbers thickened on the upper ground. Those who were interested in boat-racing, sailing matches, and sculling were in a great state of excitement below, for the struggles for the prizes were keen ones, and dead heats and victory by half-a-boat’s length were the consequence. A famous Regatta which put all spectators into the best of tempers, especially those who stood by Westbourne and had Westbourne credit to sustain. Between the races, the negro melodists, the Elvani family, the brass band out of tune, the

acrobats, and organ-grinder were gathering in their harvest; not even the military band that had lately made its appearance upon the cliff lured away many of the *élite*, or interfered too seriously with the harmony below.

Mr. Harland was trying to feel an interest in passing things; and his son was listening to—and once was discovered to be actually laughing at—the remarks of Master Ranwick, when the old chairman gave a sharp, sudden interjection—

“HURM!”

“Eh?” exclaimed Mr. Harland, “which way is she coming?”

“In sight, on the left—blue feather in her hat.”

“Can’t we pull off before she sees us?”

“We’ll try, sir, if you like.”

Mr. Harland looked round cautiously, and then gave up in despair.

“No matter. It will only agitate me to move, and I cannot be too quiet to-day. I have been already excited too much. Suppose I pretend to be asleep, Ranwick?”

“Very well, sir.”

“You can manage the rest.”

"I'll try, at all events."

"Thank you, Ranwick. If you could only manage it, I should be so much obliged. Tell her," he said, closing his eyes, "that I have had a very bad night—so I have for the matter of that—and have gone to sleep here, tired out. Tell her," he added, opening his eyes again, "that I left word that I was not to be disturbed on any account, before I dozed off like this. I do leave word, you understand, so there is no falsehood in the matter."

"Exactly, sir—that makes it all straight and proper, and no lies told. Mat," to the grandson; "don't you take no notice, but keep on a talking to the young gentleman just the same."

"Is it Aunt Courtenay, Ranwick?" asked Matthew Harland, who seemed to comprehend the position of affairs at once.

"Yes, it be she, sir."

"Oh! dear, I am very sorry. And the other one?"

"Yes, the little one."

"Then they've come back again to Westbourne," said the boy, wearily. "Go on, Mat, about that smuggling story. Wherever did you learn so many stories?"

"From sailors, my dad's old pals, my old dad's friends, most of 'em. Let me see, where was I, sir?"

"They were landing the tubs in Owen's Bay."

"Ah! to be sure they were, the artful beggars!"

They were landing the tubs still, and Mr. Harland was reclining placidly in his Bath chair, with his hand crossed on his stick and his eyes closed, when a little lady, neatly, even extravagantly dressed, accompanied by a flaxen-haired boy in a purple velvet suit and dazzling glass buttons, made their way to the position occupied by the invalid.

The lady, not more than three-and-thirty years of age, somewhat pretty and *petite*, weighed down by a top-heavy hat and feathers, and beneath which a fair display of flaxen ringlets was visible, even predominant; a lady who had married early in life, to have that boy of fourteen for a son, and who had worn well, considering domestic troubles, and a husband's loss. Youth, a pale-faced, fine-featured child, a stand-offish child, with a habit of looking askance over his shoulder to see

if his *tout ensemble* had attracted a just show of attention from the community at large that day.

“Ah! good morning, Reuben;” the lady paused, and looked from the passive figure to the wooden-visaged sentinel, who touched his hat. “Not asleep!”

“He’s had an orful night, mum, he tells me, and he left word that he’d rather not be disturbed.”

“Oh! nonsense,” said the lady, with a surprising volubility of utterance; “sleeping in the open air can’t do any one good, I’m certain, and he’d much better keep awake than do that. A delicate man like him,—why he looks like a corpse, poor fellow, lying there!”

The man who looked like a corpse gave a perceptible shudder, and the grimness of expression peculiar to his countenance appeared to deepen as they watched him.

“I’ll take the responsibility of waking Mr. Harland, for I don’t think that this is a safe proceeding. Reuben,” reaching out a cream-coloured kid glove, and suddenly shaking him by the collar of his coat, “how can you trifle so recklessly with your health as this?”

Reuben Harland opened his eyes slowly, and rewarded his awakener with far from an amiable glance.

"I hope that I may sleep when I like," he said, curtly.

"Not in your state of health, and whilst I am near to warn you of the consequences. You have no one interested in you, no one to take care of you in Westbourne but me, and I'll see after you at any sacrifice. Considering our relationship, our past relationship, if you like it better, you will allow that I have a claim upon your interest, and a right to study your welfare?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Harland, "I daresay you have. You are kind, Mrs. Courtenay, and you give yourself a deal of trouble. I should be grateful."

He stared hard at the grass edge of the cliff, as if in doubt whether he were grateful or not for all past consideration.

"A half-sister of your wife, no one nearer to you than that."

"No one that I know of. I hope not," he added, in a dry aside.

"You're not looking well this morning,"

said Mrs. Courtenay, who was a woman who dealt in plain truths, and evidently studied not fine feelings.

"I feel very well. I have been a little put out by the crowd here, perhaps. I can't bear crowds."

"Why did you not stop in your hotel, then? I had no idea that you were out with this mob,"—a disparaging elevation of a straight nose at this,—“and was coming to sit with you, to bring my work and talk of your poor dear Emily. Then my Edwin could amuse Matthew all day so nicely, I thought, and when we reached your hotel we found, to our amazement that you had ventured out this common day.”

"Doctor Spinks thought the blow from the sea would do us both good, if we were well wrapped up," argued Mr. Harland. "I presume that he knows, I pay him to know what is best, and it's an imposition if he tells me anything that is likely to do me or Matthew harm."

"Well, he may be right," said Mrs. Courtenay. "I never had much opinion of Doctor Spinks myself. I am sure that no one can look worse than Matthew does this morning."

"He's better this morning; he says so; he knows best," jerked forth Mr. Harland, after another glance at his son; "he shows more animation in passing things, and is altogether very different, I think."

"I wouldn't build too much upon him, Mr. Harland. The shock is always greater when it falls upon one unprepared. When my dear husband died, it was just as though he had done it on purpose to surprise me!"

Mr. Harland writhed uneasily.

"And that vulgar red-faced boy who draws his chair, really I wonder you allow it. What can Matthew see in that boy?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Harland, "the boy is clever in his way, and amusing, and has a good trick of telling anecdotes, and is—a something like Matthew used to be before the accident."

"I don't like the look of him at all."

Mr. Ranwick, senior, stared out at sea with an immovable countenance. Had his face really been carved in wood, it could not have been less sympathetic then.

"Matthew, dear," said Mrs. Courtenay, addressing her nephew for the first time, "are you

not going to speak to me this morning? Here is your cousin, too, waiting to ask you you are."

"Ah! aunt," he said, betraying no particular delight at the propinquity of his relations, "Mat Ranwick was in the middle of a story, and I did not like to interrupt him. How are you, Edwin; don't come too near my trap, or you'll shake me up too much!"

Edwin stretched forth a gloved hand, inquired after his cousin's health, showed no particular interest in the answer that he received, and then walked back to the side of his mamma.

At the same instant the twanging of guitar strings and the jingling of a tambourine were heard immediately behind the invalid's chair, and Mr. Harland looked dismayed.

"Send them away, Ranwick. I know what's coming, and my nerves can't stand it."

"It's not the niggers, sir; it's the Elvanis. They came into the town last night; they come here every year, and rare good uns they air."

"Send them away. I don't want to hear them."

"But the people do," said Mr. Ranwick, sententiously.

"Can't they be made to move on?" said Mr.

Harland, appealing to his sister-in-law, or his half sister-in-law, for Mrs. Courtenay had been only related to the late Mrs. Harland on the father's side, we may say here by way of explanation.

"I am afraid not," said Mrs. Courtenay; "the laws are not half severe enough upon these people."

"I can draw you further away, Mr. Harland, if you like," said Ranwick.

"No. I'll not be moved any more till one o'clock."

"I daresay they'd go for half-a-crown."

Mr. Ranwick made all these suggestions to the sea, standing with his toes turned out, and his hands clasped underneath his brass badge. Mr. Harland looked at Mrs. Courtenay for an instant, as though the idea conveyed by Mr. Ranwick might be seized by that lady, but Mrs. Courtenay was not to be moved to any exertion in that direction.

"Oh, let them sing," said Mr. Harland, giving himself a twist in his chair; "I must get used to being annoyed in this way."

"Mat tells me they're stunning, father. Didn't you say stunning, Mat?"

“Good gracious!” ejaculated Mrs. Courtenay.

“Real Italians, sir,” said Master Harland; “I think that I should like to hear them.”

“Don’t let them go, then—don’t let them go, Ranwick,” said the father with alacrity; “that’s the first time, Mrs. Courtenay, that he has ever expressed a wish to hear or see anything since that infernal accident.”

The performance began in the rear, and Mr. Ranwick condescended to turn round and face them—even to nod towards them gravely and stoically, as befitted a Bath chairman on duty, and with his fare on his mind.

“Smart they is this year and no mistake,” he muttered to himself.

The Elvani family dashed into a chorus from ‘Masaniello,’ playing and singing, if not with considerable skill, at least with a skill far beyond the average of street players. There were taste and expression—tact even in making the best of a superfluity of female voices—in these people; the tenor voice was worn, had evidently been once rich and powerful, and was too good for the streets even yet, and the instrumentation was altogether noticeable.

Mr. Harland, who had closed his eyes again,

opened them, and listened with an amount of intentness that he tried to disguise; whilst his sick son insisted upon his chair being moved more to the left that he might obtain a side view of the performers. Mrs. Courtenay and son even condescended to exhibit a passing interest in the players. The former appeared to recognize them too, for she said—

“Oh! I remember these creatures now. They were here last season, I think?” addressing Mr. Ranwick.

“Here every season, mum—just said so.”

“Oh!”

Mrs. Courtenay looked daggers at the old man for his abruptness, but he was staring far ahead of him again. After ‘Masaniello,’ a solo by the tenor with a guitar accompaniment, during which the youngest of the singers, a dark-faced, light-footed child who tripped rapidly from place to place, went round with a shell for voluntary contributions. A sharp child too, who seemed a favourite with the visitors, and was quick in her replies—replies given in a foreign accent befitting the country from which she had migrated. She was in front of the Bath

chair at last, and looking wistfully from two large dark eyes at the senior invalid.

“A trifle for the poor Elvanis, signor.”

The signor shook his head. It was a practice of his not to encourage itinerants—musical or otherwise—and he was a firm man still, for all the shake-up that he had in the railway train.

“A trifle, signor; dat will make us joyful, and dat you will never miss,” she urged; a set phrase that had been practised for some years now, and was impressive at times upon those who had never heard it before. “The poor Elvanis!”

“I have nothing to give away,” was Mr. Harland’s stern assertion.

“Poor gentleman!” was the quick answer, taken in a satirical sense by the people around them, who laughed a little.

“A trifle, signora — the poor Elvanis!” and the pinkshell was raised towards Mrs. Courtenay.

Mrs. Courtenay shook her head, but did not look down at the applicant.

“No, here too! Oh! dis is very dreadful! Ah! Mr. Ranwick,” and the eyes brightened

at the sight of the old man in the blouse, "a dear old customer of ours, who *can* afford a penny, and whose pennies I love more than other people's sixpences, because he is not sorry, ladies and gentlemen," turning to the visitors about her, "after he has parted with his money."

"Well, no, young Sarcy!"

And Mr. Ranwick began to hitch up his blouse and unfasten his coat in search of the penny which she had solicited.

"Papa, I should like to give that little girl a sixpence," said the weak voice of Master Harland at this juncture.

"It's extravagant. They're earning lots of money, these people. Ranwick," to his porter, "you're a fool."

"My own earnings, Mr. Harland, and I knows the child, and allers liked her, cos she's brisk, and odd, and lively. She was a lodger of ours—she and her lot."

"There, there, Mr. Ranwick, the gentleman doesn't want to know anything about us, and the young gentleman has found his sixpence for the poor Italians. I tank you, young signor—better health to you—*Merci*."

"Ah! Eunice," cried the younger Ranwick, "here again then."

A shake of the hands between the boy and girl, a laughing glance between them, and then the juvenile Elvani in search of silver and copper in fresh fields and pastures new.

"A bold child," affirmed Mrs. Courtenay. "I never saw such impudence in my life."

"All spirits," said Mr. Ranwick. "I knowed her when—"

"I am not addressing *you*!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay, losing all patience at this last interruption.

Mr. Ranwick shut his mouth, touched his hat, reversed his position, and looked out at the sea once more.

"Really," said Mrs. Courtenay, somewhat disturbed still, "it seems as if no one knew how to behave in these parts."

"I have come here for health, not for civilization," said Mr. Harland, wearily. "What is the time, Ranwick, now?"

After a long pause, Mr. Ranwick said:

"Hard on one o'clock, sir."

"Another half-hour. Spinks said a good long blow—did he not, Matthew?"

"Yes, papa."

"We need not keep you, Mrs. Courtenay; are you going on the beach this morning?"

"The beach! Reuben. Merciful heavens, no!"

"The Elvanis, ladies and gentlemen — a trifle for the poor Italians."

"Confound it—what again!" cried Mr. Harland.

"Oh! your pardon; I have been working round the other way, and was not aware that my little daughter had been here before me. I ask your pardon, signor."

But the woman in the Italian dress still stood before Mr. Harland and looked intently at him. She was a swarthy-faced woman in the sunlight, with dark eyes and hair that had been luxuriant and black before time or care had streaked it with grey.

"You hear that we have paid you once, woman!" said Mrs. Courtenay, sharply; "why don't you go?"

"Woman!" cried the singer, turning round almost fiercely upon the last speaker; "how dare—oh! your pardon, too, signora, I am not waiting for further alms. I—I am only struck

by the likeness that the sick gentleman bears to a friend whom I have known—who was poor enough, too, when he knew me. *You, signor, don't know me?*” she asked, anxiously, as she turned to Mr. Harland.

“Know you! certainly not. Ranwick, I am ready to go home.”

“It is not quite one yet, Mr. Harland.”

“No matter. The wind blows cold from the water, and we have been here long enough. Matthew, we are going now.”

“I am quite ready, papa.”

“Stand back, Mrs. Elvani, while I turn the chair,” said Mr. Ranwick, politely. “Thankee marm. Lor! how the woman stares!”

And Mrs. Worcester, alias Elvani, continued to stare, standing with her guitar slung at her back, her hands clasped, the scallop-shell inverted, and a sixpence and a fourpenny-piece that had been placed therein lying at her feet. She maintained her position long after the cortège had gone upon its way. It was not till the remaining members of the Elvani family had struck up a new piece, that she seemed to wake up to the business of the day. She was by the side of her husband again when

Mr. Reuben Harland was approaching the hotel, and holding the following dialogue with Ranwick.

“A strange woman, Ranwick; what is her name?”

“Elvani.”

“Italian?”

“Real Italian. I have heerd her go on for an hour.”

“Is she following us?”

“Lor bless you—no, sir,” said Ranwick, looking round. “I can see her playing away there with her husband.”

“Ah! indeed. Ranwick.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What is the exact time now?”

CHAPTER IV.

MR. RANWICK AT HOME.

It was ten o'clock on the evening of the Regatta when Mr. Ranwick went bumping home with his Bath chair. He had had a hard day's work, and was wending his way back, somewhat tired with his onerous duties, and somewhat pleased with the day's result. He had done his regular morning's job with the Harlands; he had taken an old lady for an afternoon's ride into the country, out of the way of the noise and bustle of the coast that day; he had gone back to his stand, where "Space for two Bath chairs" was written up by the side of the garden wall facing Pleasant Terrace where the green verandahs and sun-blinds were, and had not been in his place two minutes before a maid-servant fetched him to trot out a gentleman with the gout. Then,

after that there was a lady to be wheeled to the railway station, and two night-jobs connected with the fireworks on the Marine Parade, and lastly, there was home.

Mr. Ranwick lived in Old Westbourne, along with the rest of the working-classes—not a stone's-throw from the 'Ship,' where there had been much noise last night. Quite an independent old gentleman was Mr. Ranwick, living in a little cottage of his own, with garden-ground in front and rear, and a shed at the side for two Bath chairs, both his own property, one of which he let out to a trustworthy person when business was brisk. Mr. Ranwick also took in lodgers in the summer months, and, altogether, it was rumoured that, thanks to industry and thrift, the old man had saved money in his day, and might have a hundred pounds at least in Westbourne Bank: a man who had been born in Westbourne, and knew the place when there were but a boat-house and a coastguard station within a mile of the sea-cliff, who had seen the place rise and prosper, and deserved to prosper with it for holding by its skirts so long.

As he turned into the front garden, unlocked the shed, and stowed away his Bath chair, the door of the cottage was opened for him by Master Ranwick, who stood in the doorway waiting his approach.

"Ah! Mat, home afore your granddad, then. That's like a good boy, all over."

"I have been home an hour, granddad," replied the boy. "I saw the fireworks—wasn't that last one a screamer!—and have been pitching into my lessons right and left, though when I shall have a chance of going to school again whilst those Harlands work a chap like this, I don't see."

"You must make up for lost time after they have gone, Mat," said Mr. Ranwick, as he passed into the little sitting-room, into which the street-door opened, thus dispensing with the superfluity of a passage; "you mustn't grow up as hignerent as me, and pull Bath chairs about all *your* life. The schoolmaster tells me you're mighty sharp for a young un, and though I oughtn't say it agin, and spile you, why I think you air, Mat."

"I'm not last boy, that's all that I can say. I'm rather a cut under Stubbs, too, and he's

had it all his own way whilst I have been dragging about young Harland."

"Never mind. We'll fetch up. I've got such an idea for one year, just one year's finishing of you, Mat, after the Harlands have gone, and if them Harlands don't—"

"Don't what?"

Mr. Ranwick set aside his hat, hung up his brass badge on a nail over the mantel-piece, and subsided into a wooden arm-chair, all rails like a bird-cage.

"Don't what?" repeated his grandson, very attentive and very eager for a boy of fourteen.

"Don't take it out of my hands, by giving you a lift themselves."

"Oh! that's all bosh, dad," said the boy, colouring, and roughing his curly hair up with both hands; "what can they see in me?"

"Well, lookee, here now," said the old man, his wooden-features relaxing, and a shrewdness of expression taking its place thereon; "I put this and that together, and I thinks, and watches, and comes to a conclusion like a man of the world, boy. Get the tea ready while I give you my conclusion, which you mustn't build on, Mat, because building up like this

brings all the blessed bricks upon your head afore you know it. You and I old pals, with no one atwixt us, and this a secret 'tween you and me."

"All right," said the boy, busying himself with the tea-things, and the cupboard in the corner from which he extracted them.

"In the first place, Mat," said old Ranwick, "the boy has taken a fancy to you. I don't say No to it; I ain't surprised. For you're a boy *above* the common!"

"Oh! get out, dad. Well?"

"You please the boy; you ain't afeard of him, and he takes to you. You don't put on your Sunday clothes, and go and sit with him when the weather's wet for nuffin. You haven't done it for nuffin all this time."

"I have done it because you wished it; because I thought it thundering hard for a boy like him, who had been as strong as I am and as lively-like, to be moped up there alone, or with his milksop dandy cousin. I did not think of getting anything for my trouble, grandfather, upon my soul I didn't."

A bold speaking boy, loud-voiced, as befitted his robustness, and one who spoke very indig-

nantly now, as though his grandfather had imputed motives to him that were mercenary and unjust.

"Exactly, that's you all over. Don't drop the cup and sarcer, flourishing about like that. You was independent in the matter; you allers was for the matter of that. With my business on my hands you've been left a good deal to yourself, and have had yourself to manage."

"Well, I hope I haven't managed badly, dad," said the boy, with a laugh.

"Thank goodness, no, Mat. You needn't have gone because Mr. Harland axed you; you went because the boy liked you."

"And I liked the boy, poor chap."

"Right. That was genewin, and the fidgety old cove saw it, and didn't object. Now, he's as close a file as ever lived, is Harland, and with as close a fist, but I fancy that he ain't an ungrateful man. And I have been telling him what I thought of doing with your last year's edication, and I shouldn't much wonder if he does it hisself, and with his own money. And arter that I shouldn't wonder, Mat, if you play your cards well,—and you must look out for yourself, as your grandfather did afore you,—if

he don't find you a berth in London in his business; and arter that, and when he knows what a hupright, good young man you air, I shouldn't wonder werry much if he don't take you into partnership and make your fortune slap off—there!”

Young Mat Ranwick laughed very heartily at this.

“Steady, granny, steady. I don't expect as much as that. I don't expect anything from him. This is going it too strong, you know.”

“Well, it may be,” said the old man less enthusiastically; “it's an odd thought, and I don't want *you* to build on it,—for anyhow, and whoever lives to see it, up you'll go, Mat.”

“There are the Courtenays.”

“He hates them like pison, and the Courtenay boy don't like young Harland. That's a settler for him, Mat. Now old Harland don't think much of you just now p'raps, though I give him a jog now and then in a quiet way, and he's getting interested a bit; but I think that he won't forget you when the boy dies.”

“But the boy, grandfather—”

“Will go off all in a puff-like—it's as plain as can be, that,” said Mr. Ranwick com-

posedly ; “ why a babby could tell that *that* is a coming to pass—everybody knows it, and is waiting for it except *him*. And then, Mat—lucky you was christened Matthew too !—he won’t have a single relation in all the world that he cares one rap about,” he concluded with an exultant chuckle.

“ I don’t think that you would talk like this—tell me so much as this—without there was something else behind,” said the boy, shrewdly.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because it is not like you ; it’s not your way.”

“ Ah ! yes ; well you are sharp, Mat, and I’m glad to see it—very glad. Well then, he *has* promised me the expenses of your last year’s schooling. It was a bargain atween us, and we’re to keep it quiet for the present ; and it’s the beginning of all the good things that is coming up to you—hooray ! ” And the old man, so impassive in society, so excitable at home, thumped half-a-dozen times upon the table, and set the cups and saucers rattling on the board and against each other.

Young Ranwick was still bewildered. He had not given his grandfather credit for so

much acuteness; he had not thought of his own position, or had any ambitious dreams, because a sick boy of his own age had taken a strange fancy to him. He had only wished the boy to live, and he wished that now with all his heart, despite the foolish day-dreaming of his companion. He became very thoughtful after the old man's strange avowal, and drank his tea in silence, paying but little heed to the further rhapsodies of his companion.

"I hope I ain't put too many notions in your head, Mat," the grandfather said half-an-hour later, "for after the schooling everythink is fancy, naterally. But somehow I think I see it all wery plain ahead of me."

"I see nothing but a push for a place after the schooling has been given me," said Mat, "and for the schooling, I'll be grateful."

"I see more, because the guv'nor's ax-entric, and ax-entric people do all manner of odd things. And arter all, if you only get the schooling, Mat, and you lose sight o' him—which must be your fault or mine at any rate,—why there'll be that much more to leave you when I've done wheeling about the rickety uns, and am wheeled off myself round the corner here."

“And that a long day hence, granddad —” and the hand of the boy fell on that of the old man's, gnarled and knotted like the trunk of a tree, as it rested on the arm of the chair.

“Amen, for there's life in me yet, and I want to see my fortune-telling come out like gospel.”

“Oh! we won't say anything more about your fortune-telling,” said Mat, impatiently; “it unsettles me; it makes me feel odd and strange, and not like myself. We'll drop it if you please, dad.”

“I've said my say. I don't suppose that I shall ever talk of it agin.”

He was talking of it five minutes afterwards, and was interrupted in his ramblings by a low tapping at the front door.

“That's late for visitors. Are the lodgers in?”

“Yes; and in bed.”

“A horder for the morning; some one from the hotel, I daresay.”

Mat had already opened the door, and there came into the room, or rather dragged herself into the room, for the woman was weak and tired, the Italian singer of the morning—the

English woman of the night before. She was dressed in her fancy costume still, and her voice was hoarse and low with singing all that day and night, as she bade Mr. Ranwick good evening.

"Glad to see you agin in Westbourne, Mrs. Elvani," said Ranwick, "though you didn't come to us for lodgings this year. Take a seat, marm."

"We couldn't afford them; we heard that they were let at the last village," she said, somewhat irrelevantly. "What a day it has been!"

"Ah! tiring for you."

"I would rather be eternally on the tramp, I think. And yet when I am on the tramp, I think that I would prefer to drop down in the road stone-dead. You see that I am an unsettled woman."

"A little so. Only a little," said Mr. Ranwick, soothingly, "yours is a tidy business, too, in summer time, for, Lord, how the silver drops into that shell!"

"At times—on days like these—when people are about who know something of music, and can see we're rather different in our style from other—vagabonds!"

"And how's Mr. Elvani?"

"Pretty well—as well as ever, thank you, Mr. Ranwick."

"Does he—," here he went through a pantomimic action, symbolical of raising something to his mouth—"as well as ever, marm."

Mrs. Elvani looked hard at the speaker, but his wooden expression had returned, and it was difficult to make anything out of him as he sat there with his bad habit of staring straight ahead, turned on full.

"Ah! yes; if it wasn't for that," sighed Mrs. Worcester.

"Can we offer you a cup of tea, Mrs. Elvani?" inquired young Mat, from the other side of the table.

"No, thank you, boy," was the answer; "I beg your pardon—I should have noticed you before. What a big fellow you have grown!"

"So everybody tells me."

"Are you earning your own living yet?"

"Not at present. Presently, I suppose, I shall be twanging a guitar on the Marine Parade in dead opposition."

"Why you—," Mrs. Worcester paused and curbed an expression that hovered on her thin

lips. "Ah! Mat—I wish you may do nothing worse for a living all your life, and do something better, if you can. Now, Mr. Ranwick, where does this Mr. Harland come from. I want to know all about him."

"Do you. Why?"

"I'll tell you presently. I'm going to tell him—I'm not likely to make a secret of it. His shame, not mine, that I should be like this!"

"Not a relation, I hope?" with a scared glance towards the woman in the stagy dress. "If you're real Italian, why that can't be. But he's real Brazilian," with a sudden start, "both furrin! Mat, boy, what's the difference atween a Hitalian and a Brazilian."

"The Brazils!—then there's not much doubt of it. But how he has altered, good God!"

"Altered from when?"

"From the time I saw him last, when he went away a poor clerk, a poor agent of a Brazilian house in London; when he quarrelled with my father, who was living then, and went away from us. I quarrelled with father afterwards—we all quarrelled with *him*—that," with a short laugh, "was natural enough. We were

all very poor—we have been always poor—but this man here is rich.”

“Who told you?”

“Everybody knows him, I find. He lives in grand style at the hotel here, the Royal Hotel, on the cliff, where the great people go. Now tell me all about him. He comes from the Brazils?”

“Yes.”

“His Christian name is Reuben—have you heard it mentioned?”

“Well,” said Mr. Ranwick, reluctantly; “Reuben it is. I never tell a lie about anything, and that’s his name.”

“Why should you tell a lie to me?”

“Ah! why should I indeed?” muttered the old man.

“You may do me a service, and I some day, —or my children some day,” she corrected, “may do you one. There, he is my brother,—now, you’ll tell me all that you know?”

“Your own brother!” gasped Mr. Ranwick. “God bless my soul! *your* brother?”

“Yes.”

“And you a singing and guitaring for a living.”

“As likely to have happened to him as to

me, for we both started with ill luck at our backs, and bad luck in our faces, — poor, penniless desperates.”

“Then you ain’t Hitalian.”

“No—my husband’s name is Worcester—my name was Harland.”

“What a pack of lies you have been telling, all your life.”

“Mr. Ranwick,” said the woman, impatiently, “you have been kind to us in one way—you once lent us money, when we were hard pressed. It may happen that luck is about to turn, and I may put something in your way, or in that boy’s. For I shall plead hard to him, and remind him of much that he has perhaps forgotten. I shall not be afraid to say too much, or to tell him what, in his place and he in mine, I would have done for *my* sister, and for my sister’s children.”

“I can’t tell you very much,” said the old man slowly, and deliberately, “I don’t see what to tell you. I take him out once a day—Mat here trots out his son.”

“That was his son then? And he’s dying?”

“So they say. But people allers say more than they know.”

"I don't want him to die," said Mrs. Worcester spasmodically; "I have not become so bad and hard-hearted as to wish any one dead that stands in my way. With such a wish as that, I should hope to be cast back into the streets, and to hear the rich man say, 'I don't remember you, and you can go.'"

Mr. Ranwick appeared to strive for an instant, then he said—

"He may be rich—he mayn't be. He don't let me into his affairs; he pays his way, I believe—and he don't like paying that without grunting. A man as hard as nails for all the accident."

"His wife?"

"Oh! dead these six years."

"And this accident?"

"A railway accident, whilst he was bringing his son into the country for sea-air. Six months ago—a reg'lar smash up and both damaged a good deal by it, as you see."

"And there's an action against the railway company which Mr. Harland is sure to get," began the grandson, "and—"

"Don't keep a hinterrupting, Mat—it ain't to the purpose, and I daresay Mrs. Harland—"

Mrs. Elvani, I mean, for I have forgot the tother name—will be glad to get home and go to bed.”

“I’m going now to the hotel.”

“The devil you are, marm,” gasped forth Mr. Ranwick.

“Yes, I’m going when I have changed my dress, for this would scare him,” with a forced smile; “only as there’s much at stake, I called on you to give me a hint as to his character. I’ve forgotten what it was almost, even if riches had not changed it, which it must have done, for they always harden people and make them indifferent and harsh to things like us! He *is* hard, you tell me that already.”

“Yes.”

“Is he hasty, passionate like? He used to be.”

“He’s uncommon hot, if he’s surprised. I wouldn’t go to him to-night, if I was you, for all the Ingies.”

“Why not?”

“At night the boy gets worse, and he’s wrapped up in the boy, and then anythink puts him out—anythink and everythink. Besides, he’s an early man for bed, and it’s eleven now,

at least. Ten arter eleven, by George," he said, after the old struggle to find his watch again.

"Thank you, Ranwick — thank you," said Mrs. Worcester, rising; "that puts me on my guard—I'll go to-morrow morning. I don't know," she added, pausing, "whether I would have ever gone for myself, to a man who has never taken any trouble to find me. But for Eunice and Damaris, I must bear the shame of asking."

"You was allers lofty in your notions, marm. I don't know that they ever did you any harm—more likely good."

"Yes, I'll go to-morrow, Ranwick."

"I should like to know how it ended, Mrs. Elvani, or whatever you said your name was. I am interested in old friends, o'course."

"I will let you know. I should be ungrateful else. And if he meets me as he ought, as I would have met him, however poor and vile—why I shall remember you with all old friends. Oh! you cannot imagine, Mr. Ranwick, what a liberal woman I should be, if I only had the chance."

"Wery creditable o'you to say so," muttered

Mr. Ranwick; "and hard on twenty arter eleven!"

"So late—and the children and Worcester waiting supper for me. I'm afraid that I have kept you up over your usual time."

"Well—just a little."

"Good night, then, old friend."

"Good night."

Mrs. Worcester hurried back to the 'Ship,' and Mr. Ranwick turned to the grate, put his feet on the fender and his hands on his knees, and stared very hard at the fancy paperwork with which some one had embellished his fire-place. Then he sat and thought, becoming more hard and wooden and angular under the process, until his grandson touched him on the arm.

"Ah, ha! dad; this has been a good joke, after all. The real relations turn up, and down comes the castle which we were to live in together."

"Ay, ay! down it comes!"

"And nobody the worse."

"I ain't. I never thought of myself all along. But, like an old fool, I did fancy—"

"I wouldn't fancy anything more to-night,

dad," said the boy; "it has been stuff and nonsense from beginning to end, and in the morning we'll have a good laugh at it."

"You go to bed, and laugh your hardest," said the old man, savagely; "I don't want to be talked to any more. I don't want to sit here all night."

"Good night, then, grandfather. What time is it to-morrow at the 'Royal,' if fine?"

"Eleven."

"I'll go to school for an hour-and-a-half, then."

"Ah! larn as much as you can, for you'll want all your larning to get up much higher than I've got myself."

"If I'm liked as much by those about me,—why, I don't think that I shall fret."

"Well said, Mat. There, be off with you; and God bless you, and bring you lots of good luck, when the time comes for you to work in earnest."

The boy went upstairs, and was shortly afterwards heard whistling in his room. The disappointment,—if it could be called one, if it had been anything but the idle speculation of an old man in his dotage—had not affected him

in any great degree, and the ancient dreamer paused to listen.

“He don’t feel it, o’ course—because he never saw it like I did,” thought Mr. Ranwick, as he resumed his steady scrutiny of the stove embellishments. “I had a hinstinct that I was going the right road. It wasn’t, I thought, as if Mr. Harland had had relations; as if his boy was going to live; as if Mr. Harland cared for anythink or anybody; as if he would be anythink else than a poor critter that would want wheeling about all his life. I havn’t worked so long at my business, but what I know my customers—if I ain’t better nor a doctor in guessing who will get well, and who will be reg’lars, my name ain’t Mat Ranwick. And that man so full of fancies—*is* a reg’lar! I thanked Gord yesterday that he wasn’t *really* getting a bit better—though it’s two months since he first came here—and now his blessed sister turns up to-day in that Elvani woman!”

He looked at his watch again, and then got up and walked across the room once or twice with his hands behind him, as though dragging at his Bath chair still. It was his constant

habit ; and he went down the middle aisle at church, to his corner in the free seat underneath the pulpit, every Sunday morning in the same fashion.

“Mat will get the schooling, though,” he ruminated further ; “and Harland mayn’t take to the Elvanis — dash their t’other name, what is it?—for the father drinks, and the mother tipples, and the girls are mad enuf, and contrairy, especially that eldest one. I used to think I liked ’em pretty well until to-night, and if it wasn’t wicked, I should hate ’em now for coming here ! I wonder whether I *am* a going mad now ; an awful thing to happen at my time o’ life, with two Bath chairs to mind, and Mat a growing up and wanting my advice—or whether, it was a hinstinct.”

He sat down again ; he got up and paced the room—the spirit of unrest was on him that night, and he could not sit still or take himself to bed. The face shadowed more and more, and the shaggy grey eyebrows hung over his eyes with intensity of thought.

“Supposing now——”

Then he sat down again, and spoke very rapidly to himself, muttering something about

his old assertion "that he allers spoke the truth and hated lying—that he wasn't thinking of telling a lie then—not he."

He went to the foot of the stairs and called softly, "Mat, Mat, boy," and waited for the answer that never came. The answer not following, he stole softly up the stairs to make sure, and went into the little room which his grandson occupied at the back of the house. Mat had extinguished the light, but there was a full moon that night; it was shining behind the window blind, and the room was far from dark.

He could see Mat in his bed, peacefully sleeping—undisturbed even by dreams of coming greatness—his face turned to the moonlight, and looking a handsome boy enough as he lay there. One arm hung out of bed, and there was something strangely tender and loving in the way which the old man raised it, put it by the sleeper's side, and tucked in the bed-clothes afterwards.

"He'll sleep till six," said Mr. Ranwick, as he crept downstairs again. In the little parlour he once more hunted for his watch and referred to it. "Hard on twelve and he

goes to his room at eleven, which was not a lie, though he doesn't go to bed, but tries to read hisself asleep in his chair. His son told Mat so, and Mat told me, and so the news goes round and round. Blest if I ain't going round and round myself!" And Mr. Ranwick disturbed by this new phenomenon, put his hand to his temples and paused awhile.

"Yes, I'll go," he said at last, and snatching up his hat, he pulled it over his forehead till it met the shaggy brows before referred to, and then he went quickly but noiselessly out of the house, double-locking the door after him.

"I'm his sarvant, and he may be imposed on. Who has a right to put him on his guard against people who want his money, if I hasn't? I don't want nothing for myself!"

He said this again at the corner of the street, then he made a short cut across a turnip-field and a field lying fallow after a good wheat harvest, and made for the upper ground and the cliff on which was built the principal terrace of Westbourne-upon-Sea.

CHAPTER V.

MR. SEARLE.

EARLY on the following morning, a dull morning with a sea-fog on that hid the curve of the white cliffs which made so pleasant a bay of Westbourne, a woman, poorly clad, passed through the swing-glass doors of the 'Royal' hotel, and startled the porter in the hall by her appearance there.

"Is Mr. Harland up yet?"

"Mr. Harland?" said the porter, "what's your business with him?"

The porter had seen her costume at a glance; he had not sat in a corner of that hall for years without becoming a judge of human nature. This was one of the old lot; one who had picked out a name from the visitors' list,—as she had done, certainly, poor woman,—and then had come, as bold as brass, with a demand to

see the owner, being ready upon seeing him to beg, borrow, or steal anything that was in her way, or he was likely in his weakness to allow her. Therefore—like a man who knew his subject by heart, he did not say that he would see, or ask for the lady's card, or show her into a waiting-room—he simply, and even a little peremptorily, inquired the nature of the business that had brought her to the 'Royal.'

"My business will be explained to Mr. Harland himself," said the woman. "I wish to see him on a matter of importance."

"What's your name?"

"Worcester."

"I don't think Mr. Harland is likely to be bothered by you at this time of the morning," said the porter. "Here, Jones," to a domestic flitting towards the coffee-room with a breakfast-tray glittering with many covers, beneath which were things substantial for the inner man; "when you come back, I want you."

The porter crossed his legs, folded his hands together, and assumed a placid attitude; the tall woman stood on the great hall-mat, waiting the pleasure of the lackeys. The servants

hurried to and fro across the hall, up and down stairs, and into the coffee-room, after Jones; one or two gentlemen, in sea-side costumes and sand slippers, sauntered past her and went upon parade, in search of an appetite, or a bath, or both before breakfast; an imposing-looking individual, with a beard and moustache, whom Mrs. Worcester took for a foreign count, but who was only the butler, came and looked at her, and went away again, after a significant nod to the porter, which implied, "Keep your eye upon her—spoons about;" finally Jones appeared again.

"Go to Mr. Harland's room, and say that a woman wants to see him. Her name's Worcester, and she won't state her business."

"And that the business is of importance," added Mrs. Worcester.

"Mind, if it isn't, if it's a dodge," said the porter, meaningly, "you'll get yourself into trouble, for Mr. Harland's a gentleman who won't stand any nonsense. Come, is it anything to sell?"

"No, sir," cried Mrs. Worcester, impatiently; "it is not."

"Jones," said the porter, in an affected tone, as he subsided back into his chair again, "take up the lady's message."

Jones departed, and Mrs. Worcester waited patiently for his reappearance. He returned before he was expected, for Jones was a youth exceedingly rapid in his movements, and therefore of inestimable value at the 'Royal,' and said that Mr. Harland would be obliged by Mrs. Worcester walking upstairs.

The porter was surprised, but felt that it was beneath his dignity to look so, and Mrs. Worcester, with a strangely-beating heart for a woman who had endured much and kept strong, followed the servant up the stairs.

"This way, Mrs. Elvani—I mean, Worcester."

"You know me, then?"

"Why I've been four years here, and I ought by this time. You won't get anything out of him, unless—why, it ain't music-lessons for the little chap, surely?"

"No, no. This room?"

"This is the room. This way, Mrs. Worcester."

Mrs. Worcester was shown into a large

drawing-room looking upon the sea, with French windows open, and white muslin curtains before them swaying with the breeze. Breakfast was not yet laid upon the table, and three or four unopened letters were awaiting Mr. Harland's attention. As she entered, a gentleman came in by another door, and bowed to her.

"Reuben," she gasped forth, and approached the gentleman, who became less and less like Mr. Harland as she advanced.

A gentleman considerably above Mr. Harland's height, but not unlike him in figure, being somewhat thin and spare. Dark-faced, too, as he was—or as she was—but with hair very black, instead of shot with grey. Not Mr. Harland's age either, probably not more than nine-and-twenty for all that ponderous forehead, on which were already a few incipient wrinkles. He looked very hard at Mrs. Worcester as she advanced, taking her in, as it were, on the instant, with a pair of keen-flashing brown eyes which nothing seemed to escape.

"No, not Reuben Harland," she said, "I—I hope that I have not mistaken the room, sir."

"No, ma'am. This is Mr. Harland's room, and I am deputed by Mr. Harland to see you."

"But you—"

"But I am simply Mr. Harland's servant. An upper servant, perhaps," he added drily, "and one taken more into his confidence than servants generally are. Mrs. Worcester, you may trust me with your business. Pray be seated."

There was more of the gentleman than the servant in the manner in which he placed a chair for her—in the studied courtesy with which he waited till she was seated, before he took a chair himself.

"Where, where is Mr. Harland?"

"He is in bed at present, he has had a bad night, and I was telegraphed for at half-past twelve. His son is worse too, and as Mr. Harland is recommended to abstain from all excitement, I have been advised to see you."

"How does he know that my business will excite him?" Mrs. Worcester asked, suspiciously.

"Your name is Worcester?"

"Yes."

"And a sister whom he has not seen for many years, I believe?"

"You know all then. Who told you? how dared any one—"

"Excuse me, one moment, but I am a business man, and it is as well to clear the ground to begin with," he said, "it saves time too, and unless Mr. Harland particularly wishes me to stay, I start for London by the eleven o'clock train. Mr. Harland came back from the Brazils. I came with him—but that is no business of yours, is it?—sixteen months since, and with him made several inquiries concerning you. We heard then that you had married a concert singer of the name of Worcester—hence it is natural to suppose that you are Mr. Harland's sister."

"I thought that Ranwick had been here," she murmured.

The gentleman did not answer. He sat regarding her very intently, not a movement of hers escaped him. Had she been under a microscope, he could not have more closely subjected her to analysis. She felt this, and made an effort to resist it.

"May I ask what *your* name is?" she said suddenly.

"My name is Searle."

"I thought that you were a foreigner."

"Burned black in the Brazils, like your brother, Reuben, that is all. *I* could pass for a foreigner very well, I daresay."

Mrs. Worcester shrank at this, and then looked appealingly at him.

"Ah! sir—and if you could not earn your living in any other fashion!"

"Then—*then*," he added thoughtfully, "there might be an excuse for a disguise."

"Do you think, Mr. Searle, that I should alarm my brother very much by seeing him? It is not fair to keep me at arm's length, like this."

"Presently—you shall see him. On a future occasion, when we have established your identity, and thought of what is best to be done."

"He will not throw me off then?"

"Mr. Harland, madam, is a just man."

"Thank God," said Mrs. Worcester, "for oh! sir, I was afraid that he had grown too rich—too hard—to take pity upon me and mine."

"Understand me," said Mr. Searle, quickly. "I do not say that Mr. Harland is not a proud man—he is very proud. Or that he is a very generous man—for he is quite the contrary—but he is just."

"If he will act justly by his own sister—I will ask no more from him."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Worcester looked hard at him in her turn, after this dry rejoinder, but the man's face, swarthy as it was, was not unpleasant, and there was a wondrous kindness or sympathy in his brown eyes. In the streets, with him as listener and she plying her vocation, she would have been sure of a sixpence from him—unless her knowledge of human nature was at fault here.

"What do you want to know, sir? What does Mr. Harland require of me?"

"What is fair. Your position, present and past, will be looked into closely; the character of your husband will be also inquired into; the habits of yourself and family. Have I your permission for Mr. Harland to do that?"

"Ye—es," was the slow answer.

How many children have you,—Mr. Harland asks?" Mr. Searle added here, as she betrayed a little impatience at the cross-questioning.

"Two."

"Girls or boys?"

"Both girls."

"What are you doing now, Mr. Harland inquires?"

"I think that you know already."

"That is jumping at a conclusion, for upon my honour, I do not."

"We are," she said, looking down, "street musicians. Out of the common way, and passing ourselves off as Italians to attract attention—street musicians who have done our best to live honestly, sir, since we found that the streets were the proper sphere for *us*."

"The girls and all?" asked Mr. Searle.

"Yes."

"Poor girls!" he said gravely.

"My brother may know this, if you do not. I fancied that he recognized me yesterday."

"It is possible. Well, I need not detain you any longer, Mrs. Worcester. Every inquiry shall be made; and if there is nothing against you and yours, save the objectionable life which you have adopted—of course it is very objectionable and galling to a man in Mr. Harland's position,—why, Mr. Harland will have a proposition to make in the course of a few weeks. Meanwhile—"

Mrs. Worcester waited, wondering why he paused so long.

“Meanwhile you must leave Westbourne-upon-Sea. Go twenty miles away from here at least, send Mr. Harland your address, and then wait for his communication.”

“Who will make inquiries about us?”

“Several persons. Amongst them, in all probability, myself.”

“Do you understand the poor?”

“I hope so. I am poor enough myself,” he added.

“Then you will make allowances, of course, for what you hear about us; you must not believe everything that is said—and you will remember that we have been very poor, hard driven, and much troubled. You may tell Mr. Harland, too, that it is not for myself and husband that I think so much of what may be the result of this.”

“For the girls you spoke of just now?”

“Yes, sir; for Eunice and Damaris.”

“Odd names,” said Mr. Searle; “not family names, I believe.”

“No, a stage name and a Bible one, sir; the first my husband’s choosing—the last, mine.”

"A strange selection. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir. You will give my love to Reu—"

"No—I would rather not," said Mr. Searle quickly; "it will do no good, and I do not think that under any circumstances he would care for the message; certainly not under these. I shall tell him that you will follow his advice, and have confidence in his judgment?"

"Very well, sir."

She was going out at the door when he called her back again.

"Stay a moment. One fair trait of character already, and I did not expect to find it. You have forgotten something."

"No, sir."

"Think again."

Mrs. Worcester tried to think, but the man's manner perplexed her, and she thought more about him, his self-possession, his business way of arranging "the humanities."

"I have not forgotten myself I hope, in any way," said Mrs. Worcester, doubtfully; "is it that of which you remind me? If so, I cannot help it—I have not been used lately to play the lady, sir."

"Oh! no, I did not mean that. I said that your forgetfulness showed a fair trait of character—I am of the same opinion still."

"What have I forgotten?"

"To ask for money."

The woman coloured very much. She looked at him, then down at the carpet, then at him again—very proudly this time.

"I said that I thought more of my children than myself. I don't want money. We were lucky yesterday!"

"You are going twenty miles away from here, and it may be expected that till you hear from him you will not prosecute your objectionable calling. I say that it *may* be expected, for I am not in Mr. Harland's secrets, and this may be considered, if you wish it, purely my advice, for you to follow or not, according to your inclination."

"God knows that we do not want to pursue our calling. But—"

"But you cannot live on air. Can you live upon two pounds a week?"

"Yes."

"Here are ten pounds then. In five weeks' time you will hear from Mr. Harland or me."

"I will write to you to-morrow."

"I shall be in London."

"I will write to Mr. Harland at the Hotel, and—"

"Not a long letter," interrupted Mr. Searle ;
"simply your address."

"Very well. Thank you, sir, for your interest in us. I fancy that you will stand our friend with Mr. Harland."

"Oh ! I am no man's friend, I am purely mechanical."

With this strange assertion ringing in her ears, Mrs. Worcester took her way from the hotel. It was an assertion, too, that puzzled her and set her thinking of him who had uttered it somewhat carelessly, and yet with a method in his carelessness. She was a suspicious woman naturally, and for all her gratitude to Mr. Searle, she had her doubts of his disinterestedness. She doubted him, for she could not account for his presence there, or why he had been telegraphed late last night to Westbourne-upon-Sea. Had not Mr. Harland a will of his own now, and was this man his presiding genius ? And if so, would a stranger like him care for the misfortunes of her and hers and do

his best to alleviate them for his master's sake? On the contrary, might he not take advantage of their absence to work out a scheme which should redound to his credit rather than to hers? He had said that he was a poor man—and if her rich brother were under his thumb, what might not be done in five weeks? And yet he could have done everything that he wished without giving her ten pounds; the interview might have been refused her, or he might have set Mr. Harland against her at once with a story that no doubt her brother would have readily believed. Well—she would wait five weeks; she would go away as advised; it would never be difficult to find Mr. Harland, for she had friends in Westbourne, and they would apprise her of any intention of Mr. Harland to depart; there could be no harm in waiting.

But who was this Mr. Searle—and why did Mr. Harland put implicit trust in him?

CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDLY, OR UNFRIENDLY ?

MR. SEARLE passed at once from the drawing-room through the door by which he had entered to a lobby, and from the lobby to the bed-room of his master, situated on the same floor.

He found Mr. Harland sitting up in bed looking very cadaverous, and somewhat like a Guy Fawkes, with a high-crowned nightcap on his head, and a dressing-gown flung like a shawl round his shoulders.

"There's no mistake about it, I suppose, Searle?" he said, as he entered.

"Not any."

"It's devilish hard," he almost whimpered, "that I am to have my nerves still further disturbed by these relations. Did you tell her that I had a family of my own; that I might

marry again; that it was no good worrying me about her affairs?"

"No; I did not. You told me, Mr. Harland, to say that you were a just man, and would act justly by her."

"I did say something about it," replied Mr. Harland; "but I have been thinking since of what that Ranwick said, and which I haven't told you yet."

"I will see Mr. Ranwick presently."

"Ah! that will save me a long story, but he gave them all an awful character. They drink like fish, and quarrel, and fight."

"Children too?"

"I did not ask about the children," said Harland; "what are the children to do with me?"

"We will talk it all over in five weeks' time," said Mr. Searle, who seemed very anxious to avoid the subject now; "I have persuaded them to leave the place for five weeks."

"Good—Searle."

"And hinted that if they dropped their business for that period it would be all the better."

"Good. But I don't see that, for—"

"And she agrees for herself, her husband, and two daughters."

"Good."

"And I gave her in your name ten pounds."

"Bad, Searle—damned bad!"

"I thought that it was worth ten pounds to keep these poor folk from twanging their horrible guitars about the country, and perhaps telling everybody that they are the blood-relations of the rich Mr. Harland at the 'Royal.'"

"Perhaps it was, then. I haven't had time to think of it; it's a new trouble, and unsettles me. I would keep it, Searle, at arm's length."

He extended two long and skinny arms as he spoke from his extemporaneous shawl, and spoke with considerable energy.

"If it be a trouble, certainly. But that remains to be proved."

"You were always infernally argumentative," he said, more quietly, "and I'm not going to argue with you. It looks like a trouble at present, and I *will* keep cool and hard and firm till I am strong again."

"It does not look like a trouble," asserted

Searle; "but enough of that for the present. Meanwhile, whilst you are growing strong, they must not starve, or go on in that itinerant fashion."

"I try all that I can to be just," said Mr. Harland, with a sudden assumption of dignity. "There is not a man in the world who can say that I have wronged him; or if he has had business with me, that I have not treated him well. That is my pride, Searle."

"And something to be proud of, too."

"If they have not already disgraced themselves, and me, I will be just to them, and we will together consider what I can allow them. But if they are thieves and drunkards (which I believe they are), it strikes me, Mr. Seale, that they will not get much out of me. How's Matthew now?"

"He fancies that he feels a little better this morning."

"Fancies! he would not say that he felt better if he did not."

"But he *says* that he fancies he feels better."

"Ah! then he *does* feel better."

"I hope so."

"You're a miserable beggar, Searle, and will

have the last word. I did not telegraph to you for comfort's sake, you may be sure."

"Shall we talk of business?"

"That's more in your style," said Mr. Harland, quaintly; "all right, I suppose?"

"All right."

"Nothing to trouble me there?"

"Nothing."

"All the remittances right from Brazil by the last mail?"

"Quite right."

"Then why should I worry myself about business? I do not know why I should not give it up altogether. I have saved enough."

"You must save now for your son, your sister, your nieces."

"I thought that we had dropped the subject."

"Right enough. But a family man should never leave off saving."

"Not whilst his health is strong," added Mr. Harland.

"Do you think that yours has utterly failed you?"

"God forbid," said Mr. Harland, with a shudder. "What a horrible way you have of

suggesting things, to be sure! My health improves, though I must make the worst of it in the lawsuit coming on."

"Ah."

"Daniels says that he will be able to get fourteen to sixteen thousand pounds out of that blackguard railway company."

"By making the worst of it?"

"By making the best of it for me."

"Daniels is a good counsel, and a great bully. I should not wonder."

"I would ruin that company, if it was in my power," said Mr. Harland, vindictively. "I would sell every yard of iron on their roads and every brick in their arches, if I could, Searle."

"They pitched you about nicely, and deserve to pay for it."

"What can pay me for the anxiety that I have had?"

"Sixteen thousand pounds."

"No; nor sixty times sixteen. Would you be pitched about, as Matthew and I were pitched, for sixteen thousand?"

"It depends upon circumstances," said Mr. Searle, coolly; "in my present position, No. But in some cases, with a family on my hands,

and with but little to leave them, I should think the matter over twice."

"I don't believe it."

"I am not quite certain that I would not be pitched about twice over," added Mr. Searle, not heeding this contradiction; "but this is not business. Are there any commands for me?"

"Where are you going now?"

"To have my breakfast, call upon Mr. Ranwick, and then catch the eleven o'clock train."

"Cannot the business wait for one day? Any one would think that it was your own, by your anxiety concerning it."

This was not a very polite speech, and Mr. Searle appeared to reflect upon it for several minutes. If a man so self-possessed could have been weak enough to blush, it might have been imagined that his dark face assumed a shade degree more colour—mahogany colour—for an instant.

"I remember the time when you were as anxious, Mr. Harland. Here in London—out there at Rio Janeiro."

"But it was my own business."

"Still the responsibility was not greater. I feel as if it was my own, at times."

"The deuce you do."

"The lieutenant has supreme command when the captain is away, and gets arrogant and overbearing, and tyrannizes over the subordinates. That is my way, you know."

"I don't know much about your way."

"I go to town at once on business; to-morrow or the next day, I shall, at your request, search for facts concerning the Elvanis, and set others searching, and so forth."

"Now don't talk about those people again. And, Searle—"

"Mr. Harland."

"Do you know of a good finishing school?"

"For girls?"

"For a boy."

"Not for Matthew? Surely you are not thinking of that?"

"No. But I have been fool enough to make a promise about giving a boy—rather a clever boy—a year's finishing education. I don't know that I need begrudge the expense, for the boy will be grateful and do justice to his

teachers, and it *was* a promise. But it was an unnecessary expense to run into."

"What boy is this?"

"The boy whom Matthew always takes with him; the son of Ranwick who drags me about. It's an odd freak," he said, "but I was let in for it, somehow."

"One good turn deserves another. I do not know that you can in a more effectual way show your gratitude."

"Ah!" said Mr. Harland phlegmatically, "I should like to get up now, if you will ring for my man. Good day."

"Good day. No commands?"

"No commands, Searle. You will give a look in at the boy, before you go?"

"To be sure."

"And—you might come back again and give me your candid opinion as to his improvement," said the father; "though we do not always agree, I rather respect your opinion, Searle."

"I will come back."

Mr. Searle walked at a brisk pace from the room, shut the door quickly, went at a brisker pace along the corridor till he reached a second door, at which he knocked. No answer being

returned, he knocked again, when a weak voice from within said, "Come in, Mr. Searle."

"You knew that it was I who knocked then?" said Mr. Searle as he entered the room, and approached the bedside of the younger Harland.

"Yes, it's a sharp, quick knock, like yourself, sir."

"Oh! then I'm sharp and quick?" said Mr. Searle with a pleasant laugh. "Why, Matthew, if I had been a sharp and quick man, I should have made my fortune long ago."

"And have you not?"

"Not quite," was the dry rejoinder, as he sat down by the vacant chair at the head of the bed and looked attentively at the invalid before him.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Searle," said young Harland, reaching out a thin hand towards his father's manager. "I hope that you are going to make a long stay here."

"On the contrary, I must catch the eleven o'clock train back to town."

"Why—when did you arrive?"

"Very early this morning."

"On business?"

"Yes—on business," he added, after a moment's pause.

"I wish that you could persuade father to give up the business," said Matthew, with a little sigh.

"Why—it does not trouble him?"

"I don't know—but I think that he would be a very different man without it."

"I don't."

"He would have less upon his mind—he would not worry himself with the idea that it was not going on well without him."

"He has that idea then, Matthew?"

"At times. Not that," said the boy quickly, "he thinks that it is your fault—for of course he is sure that you would do your best."

"Of course," Mr. Searle replied.

"I asked him—you'll not mind me, Mr. Searle—I asked him to make a partner of you, last week."

Mr. Searle started perceptibly.

"That was a very foolish request," he said sharply; "whatever put such an idea as that into a boy's head, like yours?"

"I was thinking about it."

"You think too much."

"I have not much else to do. Mat Ranwick cannot always come here—father sleeps a great

deal—and when I try to read, the letters swim about the paper.”

“So you think in self-defence. Well, Matthew,” touching him lightly on the shoulder, “don’t think of me, my man—I think for myself.”

“But you are so old a friend of father’s—”

“No—” he corrected, more sharply than ever, “an old servant—pray don’t revive the subject, boy,—I object to it. As for a partnership in the firm—I would sooner sweep out the office. When your father is well and strong, I shall in all probability go back to Brazil, where I was brought up, Matthew.”

“To the branch firm there?”

“Yes; but this is very foolish talk of ours. And I have not asked if you feel better?”

“Not quite so strong, to-day. It’s the weather, I suppose. I ought to be getting strong now.”

He looked wistfully at the dark face of his companion, as though for an assurance of coming strength from his lips; and Mr. Searle nodded after a minute’s consideration, and said absently—

“Getting strong—yes.”

"Young Ranwick has not come yet, I suppose?"

"Not yet. I had hoped to see him before I left, but shall not have the time now. You like this boy?"

"He's an odd lad, Mr. Searle. He makes me laugh—he has so many things to talk about, and I forget all my complaints in listening to him."

"A poor man's grandson—is he not?"

"Yes; but none the worse for that."

"All the better, perhaps. Not very refined, of course—strong and rough and to the point—in fact, the boy you would like to be yourself?"

"Yes, sir. And yet a boy that would be sorry if—I mean, a boy that will be very glad when I get stronger. Upon my word, I *do* like him, sir. For he don't mind trouble; and it's strange how well he understands me. I hope one day to be of service to Mat, for I shall never forget what a good fellow he has been to me."

"Your cousin Courtenay, I should have thought—

"Oh! he's a milksop, sir—a great girl," interrupted Matthew.

"And you hate milksops—well, so do I."

Matthew continued to talk of young Ranwick; it was evident that between the boys—standing at opposite ends of the social scale as they did—an affection such as boys have at times was existent here. Mr. Searle listened for awhile, then his thoughts wandered away from a consideration of Mat Ranwick's virtues, and once he seemed about to break upon the subject with a new question that had occurred to him, and which he dismissed with difficulty.

With difficulty, for when he had risen to go, and had bidden his master's son good-bye, he stood at the door deliberating again.

"Has your father made any acquaintances at Westbourne, Matthew?" he asked, suddenly; "Aunt Courtenay set apart from the question, of course."

"Not any, Mr. Searle."

"I should have thought that the doctor had become friendly with him, or the minister of this place?"

"The minister!" said Matthew, in surprise. "Why father never sees a minister!"

"Do you?"

"Why, of course not."

"Ah! of course not—if your father keep no company, how can you? Good-bye, Matthew."

He was making a hasty retreat through the door when the boy called him back almost entreatingly.

"Mr.—Mr. Searle."

The clerk came back with a hesitant step, and the boy beckoned him close to the bedside again.

"Will you tell me, sir," he said, his great dark eyes looking into the eyes of the man facing him, "what *you* think about my getting well?"

"What I think?" replied Mr. Searle, confusedly, "why—what should I think?"

"That was a strange question about the minister, though you did not believe, perhaps, that I should see through it, Mr. Searle. People have the minister when they are likely—to die, sir."

The boy's lip quivered, and Searle suddenly sat down again by his side.

"They do not die any the sooner, my lad, for seeing him," he said, in a voice strangely changed from the abrupt, quick manner of a few minutes since; "life and death are not in his hands."

"You think that I am going to die!"

"I have not a right to think so."

"But they tell me that I shall live—the doctor is hopeful—looks so hopefully at me when he comes in here! Mat Ranwick thinks so—father—everybody. I feel, Mr. Searle, that I should not like to die yet awhile."

"I hope that you will live many years, Matthew; but I think that every one, even a boy like you, should be—READY."

"Is it possible?"

"Ah! not quite, perhaps. Prepared is a better word, and there is a difference between them."

"Are you prepared?" asked Matthew, suddenly.

Mr. Searle shook his head.

"No; I am not."

"Then—"

"Then, why preach to you?" he concluded. "I don't preach—I hate preaching. I am a stubborn man, but you are a boy whom one thought would place nearer to heaven, and in your position, Matthew, whether to get well or to grow more weak, I would have that thought."

"Still you think that I shall die, Mr. Searle? I wish that you would say so."

"Why?"

"My father always believes what you say. I would think less of getting better then—think more of leaving him all by himself in the world—try and reconcile him to living on without me."

"I have said too much already, Matthew," said Mr. Searle, "and I have a hope after all that you will recover."

"The doctor says that I may be out of danger soon."

"He should know," replied Searle, hastily; "but till I was out of danger, I should not think too much of life."

"Yes, sir; you are right," said the boy. "I see now what you mean. Well, Mr. Searle, if the worst—"

"Or the best—it may be for the best, lad."

"Or the best, then, should come, don't *you* go away from him!"

"From whom?"

"My father. No one will ever understand him in the least, or know how to humour him if you go away."

"Friends may come round him—new friends," said Searle, thinking of the relatives that had suddenly sprung up.

"Not any. You must be his friend, sir."

"My boy, I have not a friend in the world—I would not for all the world make one. Strange," he muttered, "that for the second time this day I should say that I am no man's friend!"

"But—"

"I will see that he is not misled—I will put everything in his way that may conduce to happiness; I will bring his best friends round him if they are to be discovered. There, there, I do not say dwell too much upon the future, boy—only feel strong enough to say good-bye, if God wills that it should be so—I am going now."

"*Good-bye, sir.*"

Mr. Searle went from the room, and at a rapid rate back to the chamber of Mr. Harland, who was in the hands of his valet, and being slowly decorated for the day.

"Well, what is your opinion, Searle?" cried Mr. Harland, eagerly.

"May I speak the truth?"

"Yes—why not?" with a scared look upwards.

"My opinion is that the doctor is a fool, or is wilfully deceiving you. I don't think, Mr. Harland, that that boy can live—you should be resigned to losing him."

"To losing him—my God!"

"A heavy blow. The heaviest blow that could fall on you, but which you should not think so utterly unlikely to descend. Best for the boy—best possibly for you."

"For the boy, it might be, but for me, no, no! But," he said, with excitement, "what do you know about it—what business is it of yours—how dare you come here, and try to frighten me like this? I have paid for the best advice—handfuls of money I have paid away—and the boy is getting stronger. You know nothing of medicine—of the human system; this is your old unpleasant way, highly aggravated by the choice of subject. Mr. Searle, I do not respect you as I used."

Mr. Searle bowed slightly, but did not reply.

"You have seen the boy?"

"Yes"

"Man!" with a shriek, "you have never dared to tell him your suspicions? That would kill him, and you would be answerable to me for his death."

"I have told him that in his place I would be prepared for everything."

"Then, sir," said Harland, shaking in every limb, "you have killed him, and I—I—I curse you for your officious intermeddling!"

"Sir, he should be prepared."

"Searle, Searle—for God's sake then, if you are sure—don't go home. Don't leave me just yet; don't mind what I have said. Let the business go anywhere—anyhow—it matters not. I can't be left in this house full of people, alone, with a dead son."

"There is nothing immediate—he will sink slowly away; nay, he may recover, Harland, after all."

"As surely as you are here, he will die. You said it. Don't evade the question."

"I said so," replied Mr. Searle; "but that is my opinion simply. I hope that I am in the wrong."

"Then you will not stop—you see no occasion to stop, Searle?"

"Not any," was the reply. "I shall be back again in the course of a few days."

"Yes, yes—you have promised to see after those people yourself; and to make every in-

quity, lest I should be imposed upon. I have been the victim of imposition, all my life."

Mr. Searle did not see any necessity to respond to that remark. He had become his usual self again, and was anxious to be gone.

"Are there any commands for London, sir?" he asked once more after a long pause.

"Not any."

"I will wish you a good morning then. I shall," looking at his watch, "catch this train, after all."

"You will not stay then?"

"I think, possibly, that we esteem each other the more, the less we are thrown together," said Mr. Searle, curtly. "Good morning."

"Good morning."

CHAPTER VII.

SURVEILLANCE.

TWENTY miles from Westbourne-on-Sea, and nineteen miles by the old coach-road from Westbourne proper, stood—and probably stands, for inland villages lying apart from railway stations experience but little change—an old, out-of-the way hamlet, which we will call Stackford.

A picturesque place, lying amongst the Sussex hills, and looking dark and full of shadow to the stranger advancing up its quiet main street two hours after sun-down. The village was almost asleep at that hour, although the church-clock had not sounded ten yet; only the Inn looked lifelike, with a light behind its red blinds in the parlour-windows; the streets were empty, and with one exception, judging by the lattice-windows, all Stackford had gone to roost that night.

To that one exception, the last two-roomed cottage in the row, repaired the stranger, as though familiar with the place, or with the habits of its occupants, and rapped lightly with his stick on the panels of the door to which no knocker was attached.

"Come in," said a small voice from within, and the gentleman touched the latch, found the door unfastened, and stepped at once into a little parlour lighted by a candle placed on a deal table in the centre of the room, and at which deal table a thin, dark-haired girl was reading, holding her head between her hands, and resting her elbows on each side of the book before her—her whole attitude indicative of intense interest in her studies.

"Back again at last, sir," said the child, without looking up; "I wonder what mother would say if she knew it. It's too bad!"

The new comer did not reply, but closed the door behind him, and regarded the speaker attentively.

"As for Damaris, why she has gone all the way to Endle across the hills after you, because she thought—why, who are you now?"

The girl looked up for the first time, and failed to recognize the person whom she had addressed,—as well she might fail, considering that she had never seen him before in her life.

“I am sorry to intrude,” said the stranger; “I had expected to find your father or mother here. Are you entirely alone?”

“For a minute or two, sir. My sister has gone shopping—father will not be long—mother has gone to London. Who shall I say has called?”

“A gentleman on business.”

“Will you come to-morrow?” said the child, in quite a business-like tone of voice.

“If your father will not be long, I think that with your permission I will wait for him. That is,” noticing the girl’s hesitation, “if you are not afraid of me.”

“Is your—name—Searle?” asked the child, slowly.

The stranger stared at the questioner, hesitated in his turn, and then said—

“Yes, it is.”

“They have been expecting to hear from you, sir. They will be sorry that you called, and found them out.”

"I had hoped that at an hour so late as this, I should have been sure of seeing one of your parents."

"You will be quite sure of that in the morning, Mr. Searle. Oh! at any time in the morning, for father is an early riser here. Or can he call on you?"

"No—as he will not be long, I think that I will wait."

"He *may* be very late, sir. He may be at Endle."

"Where is that?"

"That is the market-town, six miles from here."

"Four, or rather less, over the Downs, is it not," said Mr. Searle, "the way your sister has gone to meet him?"

Eunice lowered her eyes and looked at her book attentively for several moments. The little white brow was furrowed with thought or perplexity, and she was evidently considering the best course of action.

"The way my father has gone to meet Damaris, you mean," she said suddenly; "for Damaris is fond of long walks, and when it gets on to twilight, father thinks that it is time to

see after her, lest she should lose her way about the place—which is new to us at present. You are sure that you will not call in the morning, sir? It will be so much the better plan.”

“I will stay,” he said, like a man who had suddenly made up his mind to a certain course of procedure, “but if you wish it, or are frightened of me, I will take my seat on that little perch outside your door, and enjoy my cigar under the creepers until Papa Worcester comes home. What do you think of that suggestion?”

“Oh, no, sir, you must not do that,” said Eunice, rising with alacrity. “I am not afraid of anything; will you take a seat whilst I light a fire? The room strikes rather cold, perhaps,” she added, rubbing her thin hands up and down her bare arms.

“Pray do not light a fire for me.”

“You need not mind smoking your cigar in here, sir, if you’re fond of smoking,” said Eunice. “I like smoke myself.”

“You are used to it?”

“Yes—father smokes his pipe after supper when he has done reading to us. He’s a rare stay-at-home, is father. You see,” with an odd

glance at Mr. Searle, "it's market-day at Endle !"

"Ah !" said Mr. Searle, phlegmatically.

"And he may have gone almost as far as Endle after Damaris, who does the shopping when mother is away."

"And being fond of long walks prefers to go to Endle for her groceries and butcher's meat to making her purchases in the village. Is that it?"

"Yes ; that's it, sir," with another wistful look towards him.

Mr. Searle sat down, placed his hat, which he had removed on entering the room, upon the window-sill, and took up the book that Eunice had been perusing.

"*'Pilgrim's Progress !'*" he said, in his surprise, "is that a book that interests you?"

"Yes, sir. It was lent me by Mrs. Wotter, next door ; it's a *funny* book, sir ; almost like the fairy tales."

"Very funny, indeed," assented Mr. Searle ; "have you tried to understand it?"

"I was trying to make it out when you came in, sir."

"A favourite book of your father's?"

"I borrowed it to-day from next door. I told you so just now."

"What books does your father read to you, then?"

"Oh! anything that he can borrow, sir," said the girl, with alacrity; "poetry chiefly—he's very fond of poetry, indeed."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve last May, sir."

"You are the girl they call Eunice, then?"

"Yes."

"Who taught you to read?"

"Mother and father. They could not afford to pay for regular schooling, so they taught me in off-times like. I was very quick at my books from a child, sir."

"A very quick child, altogether, I fancy," said Mr. Searle; "quick at excuses, if any were necessary—eh, Eunice?"

"I don't know, sir," said the girl, suddenly colouring, and then looking down at the red tiles at her feet; "what—what makes you fancy that?"

"I am a man full of fancies, at times," was the reply. "I take odd fancies—am altogether an odd, inquisitive marplot, fussing about

business, which, after all, does not concern me. Now, why could I not have let this whole affair proceed its own course, and without any interference on my part? It *is* no business of mine, and yet I come here to spy upon a child of twelve years old. Eunice, you feel that I am a spy here, and are on your guard. Why don't you say so?"

"Sir!—I—"

"There, there, don't tell any more lies to-night. I know where your mother is—where Damaris and your father are. Your mother is at Ranwick's, at Westbourne-on-Sea; your father is drunk at Endle, and Damaris will bring him home presently across the Downs, to make sure that he does not break his neck by the way, which would be about the best thing that could happen for you all. But I wish that you had not lied so fluently, girl. Come here."

Eunice, very shame-faced, with the red blush burnt into her face now, advanced slowly towards him, with gaze averted. When she was near Mr. Harland's spy—we call that gentleman by the title which he has bestowed upon himself—he laid a gloved hand on each shoulder

and asked her to look him full in the face. The girl trembled somewhat, raised her great dark eyes at his request, and looked into two brown eyes, more piercing—perhaps, more—restless than her own.

“Only twelve years of age, and so—acute,” he said. “Well, the life has been a hard one, and a hard life makes people sharp. I am not your judge. I don’t see why I should preach to you, cross-examine you, try to deceive you more than you can deceive me. I leave the rest to the master.”

He rose suddenly, walked across the room, took his hat from the window-sill, and rammed it upon his head, tugging at the rim afterwards, in order to draw it more completely over his forehead.

“Are you going, sir?”

“Yes, I am going.”

“What—what have you found out?” asked Eunice, in an alarmed tone.

“I have found that it is all true, child,” he said, severely; “all true that has been told your uncle Harland and me. I did not expect anything else; therefore I am not disappointed. I don’t know what else could have been expected

considering what your lives have been. Good night."

"Stay a moment," said Eunice, running to the door and standing in the way of his departure. "You won't go yet, after all this, when I ask you to stop, sir?"

"What do you want with me?"

"To tell me just the worst that you have heard about us—found out about us!"

"What is the good of my telling you?"

"I may show you that it isn't so bad as people think."

"Shall I be able to believe what you say?"

"Please, yes," said the girl, entreatingly, "for I was trying to make more than the best of it, then; and when one tries to do that, why—one tells stories."

"True. Well, your father drinks hard—very hard, girl. He has not the moral courage to keep from drink, when his self-restraint for a few weeks might alter his whole life—the lives of his wife and children. I cannot say to Mr. Harland that he is a man to be trusted."

"No, you can't say that," said the girl, thoughtfully.

"You know why Mr. Harland is making these inquiries; you have been told. You have been warned against such a visit as I have made this evening."

"Yes, mother has told me that you might come here."

"Now, that mother—"

"Stay a moment, sir, we have not done with father yet; you have only heard the worst of him, and found out the worst. He is a very patient man. So patient when the bad luck comes; for he is a good father, and very thoughtful for all of us, making the best of it in his way. It's only when he's very lucky that he—he gets drunk; for he's always good-tempered, and likes other people to be as happy as himself. There, that's all true, Mr. Searle."

"What a pity that good luck should ever come in his way."

"Oh! sir, he would get used to that in time!"

A smile flickered on features that were somewhat severe and harsh for a man not yet thirty years of age, and the girl seemed to detect a difference in his looks, for she went

on with more energy, as though encouraged by it.

"It is only the first day or two that seems to unsettle him, upon my word. You would like my father very much indeed, if you knew as much about him as I did. I wish Damaris was here to speak up for him, for she's a regular father's girl, sir."

"I wish that I had seen Damaris," said Mr. Searle, musingly.

"And as for mother, sir," she said, continuing her panegyrics, and without waiting for Mr. Searle's verdict in the first instance, "why she works for all of us, and tries all she can to make us think of something more respectable than the life that we are obliged to follow. Why she works herself almost to death for us, at times!"

"There, there, I will say nothing against your mother; God forbid!" said Mr. Searle. "I have been too hard upon you already, and have no right to try and shake your faith in those who have given you birth, and—in their way, perhaps—have not neglected you."

"You think better of them now, sir," said Eunice, her eyes lighting up with satisfaction.

“Better of some of the family, at all events, and not inclined to judge any of you too harshly. I am going now.”

“Very well, sir.”

“You would prefer me seeing your father in the morning to waiting here for him?”

“Yes, sir. Oh! if you would only see him in the morning.”

“Good night, Eunice, then.”

“Good night, sir.”

He extended his hand, and shook the little thin one that was placed timidly within it, then he went away down the road, and left Eunice Worcester watching him, till the shadowy night shut him out from her gaze. At the end of the street he paused, turned to the left and passed through a swing gate and along a narrow lane, which opened suddenly upon rising ground, where the wind blew more fresh that night.

“I think a walk to Endle will do me good. I need not stay any longer in this place,” he said, “and I need not wait for Worcester’s sober moods. My mission is to see these people at their worst, and a very uncomfortable mission it is. Now, I have done with it.”

He lighted his cigar as he proceeded, and went briskly forward on the uphill path before him, fearing and caring for no one whom he might meet by the way.

Half-way to Endle, he came upon a man and child, walking with difficulty down the slope, the man's arm drawn through the girl's, and the taller and stronger of the two evidently relying for assistance on the weaker.

"Hold hard, Damaris, wench!" he heard the man say as they approached each other. "A gen'elman with a cigar—the gen'elman will 'blige another gen'elman with a light, am sure. Shir," addressing Mr. Searle, "will you 'blige a gen'elman with a light?"

"With pleasure."

Mr. Searle took the cigar from his mouth, and Mr. Worcester made several attempts to light his pipe, by holding the fiery end to the bowl, swinging from his heels to the tips of his toes meanwhile.

"It's very strange, 'deed, but can't manage light," he said, returning the cigar at last completely extinguished. "Much 'bliged to you, all same, shir, and wish you pleasant journey—good evening, shir."

“Good evening.”

“Come, Damaris—what, snivelling again? What on earth is there to grizzle about, now, I wonder? You ain’t like anybody else at all, Damaris. Steady here—keep step, my lass—keep step, please, or you’ll throw me out.”

“So, I have seen the whole of them, in spite of myself,” said Mr. Searle, as he marched up the dark hill-side again.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAVES THE WAY FOR MANY CHANGES.

THE visitors are thinning at Westbourne-upon-Sea, although the weather remains fine and the air is pure and warm there. It is the end of September, and many pleasure-seekers have gone home—those who seek health and strength remaining to the last, grateful for less noise upon parade and the absence of the promenade band, which has migrated back to Germany contented with its season. The fishermen are on the move for Ramsgate, Plymouth, Penzance, and praying for good luck with the herrings; the Royal Hotel remains no longer full, and supplementary waiters are discharged; rents are coming down in terraces and crescents; flymen remain longer on the ranks, and are more obtrusively eager for fares amongst the visitors still left there; the first

volumes of the novels are to be found at last upon the shelves of the Marine Library, which is great in novels, children's toys, and prayer-books; half the bathing-machines are in rank and file in a field three hundred yards away, and beggars, organ-grinders, and diverting vagabonds have gone farther west and south.

A wooden-visaged man, who lets Bath chairs on hire and acts himself as guide, has not felt the slackness of the times much; for morning after morning, at the usual hour of twelve, he drags along the upper parade, slowly and carefully, a dark-skinned, small-eyed man, wheels him to the old spot on the cliff, turns him with his face to the sea, and stands beside him a grim sentinel.

The smaller Bath chair with the smaller invalid, drawn by the wooden-faced man's son, is no longer there. The one left is in the deepest mourning; steeped in black as it were, to within half-an-inch of his hat. The figure of a man who has suffered much grief as well as pain is Mr. Harland's now; the one expression of the face is utter misery. They who are left in Westbourne-upon-Sea yet, regard him curiously and not without sympathy. Many of them know his

story,—have made it their business to know it, and regard with pitying eyes the man who has lost his last hope.

The servants who wait upon him with cushions before he is finally settled in his place, are steeped in black to match their master, and though Mr. Harland has not noticed it, the Bath chair man wears black trousers, and has a rusty band, by way of complimentary mourning, round his rustier hat.

Mr. Harland, ever in his place facing the sea, takes no heed of passing things, enters into no conversation with the man at his side, but sits heaped within the chair, with his hat tilted forward on his eyebrows, and his cloak drawn very closely round him. The man intrudes not with any observations; he has given up offering remarks for the last three weeks, for they disturb his fare and elicit no reply. When it is close on two o'clock, Mr. Harland exhibits slight signs of restlessness and looks inquiringly at the man, who tries to find his watch and finally gives out the time in a sepulchral voice. At two precisely, Mr. Harland nods his head, and Ranwick backs and twists the chair and then drags its occupant to the 'Royal,' where the servants, steeped in

black, are ready for him. The next day at twelve o'clock precisely, Mr. Harland steps into his Bath chair again, Mr. Ranwick moves on, the servants follow, and the business of the day recommences. What becomes of Mr. Harland apart from this time, shut up in the large room of the 'Royal,' only the valet knows. The doctor calls once a day, feels his patient's pulse, and changes the medicine occasionally, and then Mr. Harland is left to his own resources.

The valet, who says he is hipped to death and must give warning or take to brandy and water, tells the landlord of the 'Royal' what becomes of Mr. Harland all day, and the landlord is naturally curious concerning a man who, though he gives but little trouble and pays handsomely for the accommodation granted him, has damaged business by his son's death on the premises. So we learn the news.

"He is put in his chair before the open window," says the valet, "or he creeps into it if he is strong enough, and there he sits between the meals staring out at sea, till it makes me sick to see him at it. He wont talk, and he wont answer if anybody talks to him. He has a lot of letters during the week; the ones with the

city address on the seal he just glances at and then locks up in his desk; the little ones from Mrs. Courtenay—Mrs. Courtenay has the singular crest of a lion with something in its paw, and therefore I know her notes by heart—he drops into the fire, if there's one handy, or tears slowly to pieces if there isn't, without looking at a line of them. Now and then, when he is very lively, which occurs about twelve o'clock at night, he'll take it into his head to write a letter or two before going to bed,—writing very slowly, and thinking very carefully of what he shall say next, between every word. Those letters are all addressed to Mr. Searle,—that's his business man, and a rare fine thing he must be getting out of the business with everything in his own hands as it is. For my part"—the valet had evidently no faith in human nature—"I would rather have that man's berth than the master's."

"Don't you think that the master will go out of his mind if he keeps on long at this?"

"I don't think myself that he has been ever in it," replied the valet. "He's as odd a fish as ever lived."

"A stock fish," says the landlord, who is a bit

of a wag, and the valet and the landlord laugh at the little joke which they have had between them.

It is the end of September when Mr. Harland is compelled to find his voice. Ranwick is at the side of the Bath chair, and Mr. Harland's face is towards the sea as usual, when a youth dressed in black suddenly appears before the invalid.

"I couldn't leave here, Mr. Harland, without a word," the youth says, fearlessly. "Grandfather thought that I had better go away to school without seeing you; but I didn't think that it was quite fair, and so I have chanced it, sir. I hope that you will excuse the liberty of my coming to thank you for your kindness,—to say, too, that I will do my best in all ways to deserve it."

"Now make your bow and go, *Matthew*," remarks Mr. Ranwick, with an emphasis on young Ranwick's Christian name. "Mr. Harland is not inclined for conversation this morning."

"Stay a moment," says Mr. Harland, languidly.

The boy remains ten minutes or more, and Mr. Harland looks out at sea all that time, ruminating.

"You will learn all that you can?" Mr. Harland says at last.

"Depend upon that, sir."

A self-sufficient answer ; but uttered heartily, as by one who has made up his mind to study hard.

"If you get on well at school I may do something more for you, for Matthew's sake. I wonder," he adds, looking at the boy for the first time, "what he saw in you to like."

"His old self, in some respects, *I* know," cries Mr. Ranwick, suddenly.

"Be silent, please. I have asked you as a favour not to talk to me till I am stronger. You," to young Ranwick, "can go now."

Young Ranwick departs, and his grandfather puts his hands behind his back and looks out at sea along with the gentleman at his side.

But the spell of a long silence has been broken, and Mr. Harland, half-an-hour afterwards, mutters, to Mr. Ranwick's surprise,—

"I don't look for any gratitude. I don't believe any more in human gratitude than Searle does."

"Sir?" says Mr. Ranwick, interrogatively.

"I did not speak," is the reply.

Mr. Ranwick casts up the whites of his eyes, as though asking pardon above for Mr. Harland's falsehoods, but hazards no contradiction, although he ventures to prove *his* gratitude soon afterwards.

"I hope, Mr. Harland," he bursts forth with, "you'll let me thank you, just this once, for your interest in my grandson."

"I have no interest," replies Mr. Harland.

"For your kindness to him, sir, I mean,—a great kindness which neither of us is likely to forget,—him especially."

"It will cost me a hundred pounds, books and all," soliloquizes Mr. Harland again.

"It's handsum, sir, and he'll live to pay every farden of it back, for he only wants the chance. Your son saw that, young as he was, and—"

"Home, Ranwick," sternly orders Mr. Harland.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Harland is drawn homewards, and at the door of the hotel Ranwick is startled out of his usual equanimity by his fare saying :—

"I shall want you again this afternoon."

"This afternoon, sir? With the chair, do you mean?"

“Yes ; at four.”

At four o'clock Mr. Ranwick is in attendance, and Mr. Harland is led from the hotel by his valet, who is also equipped for walking on this occasion.

“To the parade again, sir?” asks Mr. Ranwick.

Mr. Harland motions him to the valet for further information.

“To the cemetery,” explains the valet. “I’m to help you if it’s necessary. The governor,” in a subdued whisper, “is a cheering up a bit, at last !”

A long, long journey in the hot sunshine to the cemetery, with Mr. Ranwick tugging his fare along the dusty country road and the valet pushing up behind at times when the ground is rough or hilly.

“It’s a mussy that he gets lighter every day,” thinks Mr. Ranwick. “But if he gets much lighter I shall think he’s going off arter his son, and then with nuffin binding in black or white, dashed if I shan’t be let in to pay for Mat’s grand schooling all myself !”

At the cemetery at last,—a new burial-place for Westbourne and many towns adjacent, lying

on high ground and in the heart of the hills ; a pleasant spot to rest in away from the stir and business of life. Here the new-made grave of Matthew Harland, who departed this life on August 31st, 18—, aged fourteen years, as duly recorded on statuary marble in the splendid testimonial to the dead that has been already placed there.

“Searle has been quick,—I thank him,” Mr. Harland is heard to mutter by his attendants, before he motions them away. To a long way distant from him he directs old Ranwick and the valet, his gloomy face looking round the chair from time to time, and the black gloved hand still indicating “further back.” When he is satisfied with the distance between him and his attendants, he relapses into his old attitude and draws his cloak tightly round him as though facing the sea-breeze on the cliffs at Westbourne. But the proud man’s face shadows more and more and is not of the statuesque expression of the morning,—he has found courage to come, but he cannot bring his characteristic stolidity to his son’s grave yet awhile ; his head bows more and more forwards, and at last the heavy sobs of a man in grief are heard there.

A great grief, but the hot tears may have saved his reason, who can tell? He cries like a child now,—as he has not cried since he was a child himself. People say that he turned to stone when his son died; they would have been glad, those interested in him, to have seen him more impressionable and human on that September afternoon.

One man we believe is glad, though he is not Mr. Harland's friend,—though it is his boast that he has not, and cares not for, one friend in the world. He comes upon Mr. Harland in his grief and says:—

“This is a good sign, sir. I am glad to meet you here.”

“A good sign! Why?”

“I will explain another time, Mr. Harland.”

He is about to withdraw again, when the master says:—

“Don't leave me, or I shall die. I have given way, and it was foolish and suicidal perhaps. Oh! Searle, every hope that I had in my life lies buried in the boy's grave—every ambition—every atom of happiness.”

He beats his gloved hand on the front of the Bath chair, he shakes them at the Heaven which

has been so hard upon him, as he thinks ; he dashes himself back in his seat and cries and sobs, whilst Mr. Searle looks at him in astonishment. Searle has only known this man as hard as granite ; in business life and life domestic, before his fortune was made and when it was made by him, when his wife was living, and afterwards, when but the boy was left him, always strange, impenetrable, and callous. He may know him in the future days as the same odd man who has been so long his master ; but he will remember the father at his son's grave from this day, and think the better of him.

"Every hope, ambition, happiness," quotes Mr. Searle ; "and you but forty years of age. This is the shock of the first grief, and you are not yourself yet."

"And never shall be."

"You must try to step back to yourself ; take again that interest in your business, study again with that interest to become rich, which has raised you to so great a height."

There is a faint ring of scorn evident in the consolation offered by the manager ; but Mr. Harland detects it not.

It is the best consolation which Mr. Searle

thinks that he can offer—that fresh pursuit of wealth in the world wherein his master has been fortunate.

“I have no one to strive for now—no one to get rich for, Searle. Caring nothing for myself, why should I struggle more than you do?”

“You remember my creed then; you have not forgotten it?”

“No.”

“Ah! but we stand on very different ground. You have duties to fulfil which your conscience will not permit you to neglect—you are not, and can never feel alone. *You* have no right to be unsympathetic with your kind, and to distrust the faces round you. Mr. Harland, I have come to talk about your duties to your kinsfolk.”

“I leave the matter to you.”

“I have done my share of work; and it is your turn.”

“Do anything that is just; that you consider is just on my part towards my sister and her children.”

“Will you not see them?”

“Not yet. I have not the strength to face them, Searle,” he says, nervously; “you must

write to them, call upon them; arrange everything for the education of the children, and the maintenance of Worcester and his wife, if they must be maintained," he adds, with his huckster's spirit predominating; "tell them that I will see them presently."

"I would prefer talking the matter over with you this evening, before I commit myself in your name to anything."

"Very well," Mr. Harland answers, wearily; "I suppose it must be."

"Perhaps in these children——"

"There, there; don't prophesy to me, Searle, about them," he interrupts almost angrily; "I am not interested in them in the least—I never shall be. Point out to me what you consider my duty in this matter, and I will follow it not il-liberally, but I must not be troubled by them. I give my money to them, to be saved from trouble! Call those two men yonder and let us get home."

Then the four men proceed down the hilly land together towards Westbourne-upon-Sea, and Mr. Ranwick listens to all that is said by the way, and learns, amongst other things of less importance, that the action for damages against

the London and Great Southern Railway is to come on in a week's time, if Mr. Harland has strength to enter an appearance in the court.

"I'll be there," exclaims Mr. Harland, with an energy that he has not shown since the day he lost his son. "I'll be carried feet foremost into court, but what I will show the jury the wreck the devils have made of me! Searle, on your honour, am I looking so well as I was?"

"No," answers the gentleman addressed.

"I'm glad of that for once," he cries, exultingly; "it will tell in my favour and increase the damages. Totally incapacitated from the management of a business which requires my direct supervision—that will tell in court!"

"Not a doubt of it."

"The whole concern left to hirelings," he adds, without much respect for the feelings of his listener.

"Who may be robbing you at every turn, and you not a whit the wiser," adds his listener, coolly.

"Exactly. That is the true rendering of the case, and that will bring in sixteen thousand

pounds, and costs. Sixteen——oh ! my God !” he wails forth piteously, breaking down again ; “ and no one to share it with me, or rejoice in my increasing wealth ! ”

“ Your nieces,—in the future, when they are grown up, and you are proud of them.”

Mr. Ranwick jolts the chaise more than is necessary at this ; Mr. Harland shakes his head.

“ No ; not my nieces. They must not build on any chance of my money, Searle ; they shall not have it.”

“ In the evening, we will talk of this.”

“ Oh ! I have talked enough now ; the excitement seems like a relapse, and who knows if I may not be found dead in the morning myself. I should like to live the trial over.”

“ Then there is something to live for yet, Mr. Harland ! ” says his head-clerk.

“ Yes ; you’re right after all. I shall be strong presently, I trust. Quite my old self again, please God,” he adds, feebly.

“ Please God—no,” is the quick answer here ; “ a something better after this affliction, at all events.”

“ What was I before this trouble then—before my accident ? ” asks Mr. Harland, almost

savagely; "speak out. You were never afraid of hard truths, or personalities."

"Mr. Harland, I have not come to Westbourne to argue with you on any topic under the sun," replied the other; "in argument we do not agree, and you excite yourself, which is bad for you and dangerous. I said, 'not your old self;' because your new self is a something better,—if far from perfect."

"You said a little while ago that I must step back to myself."

"Not your old self."

"If I step back at all, it will be to what I was."

"*Then*—but," corrects Mr. Searle, quickly; "we have spoken enough of this, and you must not lead me into argument."

"I don't want to argue with you," and the principal screws himself into the furthestmost corner of his chair, away from the subordinate, and says no more. He is fast asleep when they reach the 'Royal,' the fatigue of the new day, the sudden beginning of the new life has been too much for him, and the valet and Mr. Searle have a difficulty in waking him.

He dines with Mr. Searle, and is drowsy over

his meals; so dull and drowsy after dinner, that Mr. Searle, with evident reluctance, postpones the great subject of the poor relations till the morning.

“He must take all the responsibility of this new step,” Mr. Searle asserts to himself, at a late hour of the evening; “and something of the blame, whatever happens. His relations, not mine; his business, not my own. I take no interest in the rise or fall of these Worcesters. Lewis Searle is purely a machine that sets the wheels in motion, and grinds out his placid life disturbed by no one’s troubles. Upon my honour I begin to admire the situation very much!”

He sits cross-legged upon the chair that he has taken into the balcony, with his arms folded on the back, and his face not looking quite so swarthy in the moonlight. He smokes half-a-dozen cigars, at least, in a quick, excitable manner, first learned in the Brazils, flinging away stumps of large proportion, which sailor-boys will pick up in the morning and smoke out for him, and lighting up again with renewed vigour at every fresh Havannah; smokes the night away on the balcony, and looks at the sea dreamily, follows

the moonlit path struck on it, as though it led his own way, and he could see to the end; and takes no heed of the master sleeping soundly in his chair within, oblivious to the coming events that are stealing on towards him.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HARLAND'S ULTIMATUM.

THE Worcester, alias the Elvani, family are all at home in the cottage at Stackford when Mr. Searle at last appears there. The Worcesters have received notice of his coming, for Mr. Searle has written, fixing time and place, evidently preferring for a change to see these nomads at their best.

They are in their best and looking their best, when Mr. Searle knocks at the cottage door; they are on their best behaviour, when he walks into the little room and suggests that it is a fine day, but somewhat cold.

“We catch the first sign of coming winter, in this north-easter,” he adds.

“Not the winter of our discontent, sir?” says Mr. Worcester quickly, and then the two men regard each other attentively.

Mr. Worcester looks his best, certainly—he is clad in a decent suit of black, and is well brushed, well washed, and spruce. There is a dapper air about him which may be taken for ease of manner or elegance of style, but which is somewhat new to his children, who regard him furtively and wonderingly. Those children have been thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned till they shine again, and their dark hair is more glossy and smooth than they have ever known it. They wear brown merino skirts and velvet spencers—the velvet spencers having been ingeniously constructed from their property jackets, from which the tags and tassels have been stripped, the mother hopes, for ever. The mother is neatly, if poorly clad also, but looks more thin and worn—as though the long suspense had told upon her since she came one morning to the Royal Hotel to see her brother Reuben.

Mrs. Worcester has risen and bowed respectfully to the man who holds her future in his hands; Mr. Worcester has already placed a chair for him; Damaris and Eunice have dropped their curtsies and subsided into the background, standing by the window, where the

light falls upon them—just as Mr. Searle could have desired it.

“No—not the winter of your discontent,” says Mr. Searle, in reply to his host’s question; “if I have not brought you glorious summer, at least I am not the representative of a hard frost.”

“A hard frost at the heart of Mr. Harland—well,” says Worcester, rubbing his hands complacently, “thank God for the thaw!”

“We received your letter by yesterday afternoon’s post, Mr. Searle,” the wife breaks in here, “and are glad to have an end put to our anxiety—we have been, of course, naturally anxious.”

“Naturally?”

“We should have been prepared for bad news, had there not been,” she adds thoughtfully, “a something of promise in your letter. Prepared for bad news, because my brother holds aloof from us, and will not see us even now.”

“Better for you all,” is the answer.

“I don’t know that,” asserts Mr. Worcester, “at present his idea is that we are vagrants—street musicians with all the vulgarity of the streets attached to us. We should have dis-

abused his mind of that impression, I take it, on the instant."

"Mr. Harland is not well enough to see any one; this meeting would have excited him, and in excited moments, he is not so generous and considerate as you might suppose."

"You know best, Mr. Searle," replies Worcester. "I concede the fact. Shall we to business? I pray you to be seated."

Mr. Searle takes the chair to which his attention is again directed in a high-flown manner; Mr. and Mrs. Worcester seat themselves facing him; the dark-eyed children stand in the background, listening.

"I hope, Mrs. Worcester," Mr. Searle says, "that you agree with your husband on this last point."

"I don't see," she utters somewhat petulantly, "why he could not have seen his sister—why he hides from his own flesh and blood like this."

"Ahem! Caroline, my dear," delicately hints her husband, "Mr. Searle has already explained that. Your brother is unwell."

"Then who has a greater right to see him than I?"

"He will see you all in good time when he is stronger," replies the manager.

"And you will allow us?" adds Mrs. Worcester, "for he is in your hands, and is guided solely by your advice."

"I wish he were," says Mr. Searle. "I would advise him very strangely, and not always to his interest. Advise him while the chance was offered me, for I am going back to the Brazils next month. You remember your brother, before *he* went abroad?"

"To be sure, sir; I was twelve years of age."

"Was he a man easily led then?"

"No; he was a very stubborn young man."

"If you will believe that he was wax at that time and to be moulded into any shape or character in comparison with what he is now, you will be able to judge of the influence I exercise over Mr. Harland."

Mrs. Worcester colours and looks somewhat abashed at the tiled flooring. She even wrings her hands together, as though the reply might be taken as a rebuke to her suspicions, and says slowly :

"Pardon me, Mr. Searle, I am a hasty

woman, and naturally suspicious. Such a life as mine has not tended to improve my character. You are in my brother's confidence, and I am not—hence I am to a certain extent jealous of your power.”

“Bravo, Caroline!” applauds Mr. Worcester, “the *amende honorable*, and no mistake. In good society, Mr. Searle, you perceive what a woman this would have been.”

“Be silent,” Mrs. Worcester answers, techily.

“I am sorry that you think I have power over Mr. Harland,” Mr. Searle says, thoughtfully, “for you will make me answerable for Mr. Harland's ultimatum.”

“You must have some power.”

“Not any.”

“He relies upon you as his friend?”

“He relies upon me as his business manager. He is distrustful—it may be a family failing for what I know,” he adds caustically, “but he favours me by believing that I am an honest servant; and as that is a great deal for Mr. Harland to believe in any man, I am proud of his opinion. When that opinion changes—I shall not be surprised for one, or care a great deal for the transformation.”

"Ah! you are a philosopher—a man who is always ready to face the worst," cries Mr. Worcester; "such men I always admire, for I take after them."

"They deal in sham contentment, after all," replies Mr. Searle; "but let us change the subject—we are wasting valuable time."

"My fault, I fear," says Mrs. Worcester, humbly enough now.

"Yes; your fault—you began it," replies Searle. "Now then."

He settles himself more comfortably in his chair, and then looks round at the children for the first time.

"You girls are interested in this story—will you come and hear it?" he asks, and Damaris and Eunice, with their arms linked together, slowly approach the speaker. Mr. Searle looks close into their faces; they are thoughtful faces now, and the wide and more massive brow of the elder girl suggests a more self-reliant character to the observer. The face is more of a woman's face, and there is a less happy expression thereon than Eunice wears; the favourite of the father has, strangely enough, more of the mother's looks than the

younger sister has. Eunice appears as if a word, or a glance, would light her up with smiles, and Searle perceives that as he makes known Mr. Harland's wishes, it is she who first seizes the position in its entirety, and considers the new life which it opens out to all. He finds himself after awhile addressing this child of twelve rather than the rest of the community, as though he doubted her decision, and would endeavour to change it, if adverse to her uncle Reuben's wishes.

Mr. Searle does not make a long story of all this. He has a habit of speaking very rapidly and to the purpose when uninterrupted by his listeners, and in less than five minutes the Worcesters know what is to be expected—possibly for good—from the rich relation.

“Mr. Harland trusts under any circumstances to be free from importunity,” begins Mr. Searle; “that you will all leave him to himself, and never attempt to thrust yourselves upon him until his permission be first granted. To do so will be for him to withdraw his support from your children.”

“The children!” says Eunice to this.

“I do not think that he acts illiberally for a

brother whose connection with you was sundered years ago, when he proposes to save these girls from the streets—to pay for their education, for such an education as shall make them fit for any position in life; and to see, after it is completed, that they are put in a way to gain a fair livelihood for themselves. But he promises, understand, no more than that education, on which no money shall be spared, and a choice in life, somewhere and somehow, after it.”

“He does not adopt them entirely?” asks Mrs. Worcester.

“He will neither adopt them, nor leave them any money in his will.”

“Why are you so sure of this?”

“I am not sure,” answers Searle, “but they are his words, and his mind at the present moment is made up to that. Nothing under heaven could change it.”

“But when these girls change—”

“Then we shall be able to hope for better prospects,” concludes Mr. Searle, “and *when* you have quite done interrupting me, I will finish my task.”

“There’s something else then.”

“There are a few more conditions, which you

will think hard at first, but which show that Mr. Harland has possibly a something in view for your daughters at the end of their schooling. In the first place, Eunice and Damaris are to be placed at separate schools, and are not to see each other again for four years."

"What is that for?"

"They enter new worlds, and must be free entirely from past associations," says Mr. Searle; "my master thinks that one might possibly spoil the other."

"You will excuse me," begins Mr. Worcester, "but—"

"You will excuse me finishing my statement before any further remarks are thrust upon me," says Mr. Searle; "the girls are to be separated from each other, and from their parents, until those four years have expired. As for yourselves, why, Mr. Harland will allow you a hundred a-year as long as you live," looking at Mrs. Worcester whilst he spoke, "and so long as the old musical profession is abandoned."

"Will he allow us that, if we do not agree to the children being taken from us?" asks Mr. Worcester, eagerly.

“Yes.”

“Then curse his education scheme—we can educate our children for ourselves. Why, Damaris,” turning to his elder daughter, “what do you think of all this plotting to part the lot of us?”

“I—I don’t know, yet.”

“And to show that he is not devoid of brotherly affection,” continues Mr. Searle, “Mr. Harland is willing in a few weeks’ time to offer *you* the shelter of his home, Mrs. Worcester, providing that your husband can agree to a separation, and is willing to leave England upon the income already mentioned. Living is much cheaper abroad, you, know,” turning to Mr. Worcester.

“Ye—es,” replies Worcester, biting his nails and looking on the ground.

“That is all?” asks the wife, as Mr. Searle pauses.

“That is all!” echoes Searle.

“I see that I am rather in the way in all this,” says Mr. Worcester, “that I am the rock-a-head to Mr. Harland—not to the family exactly—and a man, perhaps, whose bad habits are known to you. You do not require an answer directly to all these propositions?”

“No.”

“Will you give us a week to make up our minds?”

“Longer if you wish.”

“A week will do, thank you, Mr. Searle,” replied Worcester; “in a week we shall have decided for good or for bad,” he drily adds; “meanwhile be kind enough to deliver our thanks to Mr. Harland—and accept the same for yourself.”

“Don’t thank me,” is the quick reply; “you have nothing to thank me for. I am not interested in you, in the least. I shall be very glad when it is all finished, and I can shake you from my mind again.”

“I hope we haven’t troubled it,” says Mr. Worcester.

“But you have—the lot of you have been a nuisance to me. I like the management of my own affairs, and not of other people’s. I fall in for the worry without taking any interest in the matter.”

“That’s singular.”

“I don’t think so.”

“We poor strollers,” says Mr. Worcester, “have aroused no interest in you, then?”

“Not the slightest in the world.”

“Why you are a harder man than my brother-in-law.”

“I hope so.”

“Perhaps Mr. Searle has seen trouble like us?” says a childish voice at his side; and he looks down and sees Eunice. He starts, and answers in a different voice—

“I *have* seen trouble, child. I should have been a very different man if I had not.”

He rises and passes at once out of the house, and the Worcesters see no more of him for seven years.

CHAPTER X.

THE ELVANI FAMILY IS BROKEN UP FOR EVER.

As the door closes, Eunice runs into her mother's arms.

"Oh! we had better keep together—that will be the best for all of us!"

"No—no, you are too young to know what is best; and yet," pausing, "you should be old and wise enough to see the advantages for yourself which your uncle's offer holds out."

"Yes; but you and father without us!"

"Ah! you think of that. That's well, Eunice—that sounds well for the future."

Damaris remains very thoughtful. Once she looks wistfully towards her father, and is about to speak, when he checks her.

"We shall have plenty of time to talk of this within the week. I fancy that we have had quite enough of it at present," he says, with a

forced lightness of demeanour ; “ you two girls go upstairs and talk of it together if you like, but for God’s sake don’t begin again now ! ”

He stoops and kisses them both, to the surprise of them and their mother.

When the daughters have left the room, Mr. Worcester moves with a quick step towards the door, taking down his hat from a peg in the wall as he proceeds.

“ Where are you going ? ” peremptorily asks his wife.

“ Not far—only a little way.”

“ Only as far as the gin-shop ! ”

“ No ; up the hill for a breeze, to think of this for myself—to think, Caroline, of what is best for the lot of us. I—I shan’t drink to-day ! ”

“ Shall I tell you, Worcester, what is best ? ”

“ Well,” he answers, irresolutely, “ I don’t care a great deal about it just now.”

“ You know what is best already for us all,” she says moodily ; “ can we shut our eyes to so plain a truth ? ”

“ No, we can’t,” replies her husband, with a spasmodic laugh ; “ you’re right enough, old girl, you always are. I have thought it over

already. I knew what was coming, and had made up my mind to it when that man gave us Mr. Harland's programme. It's a breaking up of the musical and classical entertainment of the Elvani Family, as exhibited before the crowned heads of Europe with IMMENSE success!"

Mr. Worcester's light demeanour only adds a shade more gravity to the worn features of his wife.

"It's a breaking up for their good and yours," he continues; "therefore, so much the better. As for me, I shall do the magnanimous, decline the hundred pounds, and earn my own living in the way that suits me best. Bob Worcester never had a difficulty to live, and I suit my vagabond life, as my vagabond life suits me. Upon my soul, it would be impossible to rest. I'm very much in the way of you all. I shall like the novelty of being my own master, vastly!"

"Worcester, the children must not lose their chances in life, whatever the sacrifice to us. With us, a terrible future, perhaps—with *him*, prosperity."

"You will go to your brother's?"

"No. Together, both of us, to the end. I

don't see, Worcester, what you would do without me, except kill yourself with drink."

"Oh! trust me in that. But—you—you—are not silly enough to keep with me, when you and your daughters might all live together. Why, I never dreamt of such a thing. You ought to have tired of me long ago. Upon my soul," with his old, easy, awful pledge again, "I'm not worth a moment's thought!"

"You were going away just now."

"Well, I was."

"For good?"

"Yes. I thought that the easiest way to settle it, by never coming back!"

"Presently we will go together, you and I. We are both in the way here, and we will give Eunice and Damaris room to forget us," says the wife.

"Well, well, they will be taught that with their other accomplishments, I daresay."

"They will become ladies—think of that, Worcester;—ladies, perhaps."

"Instead of street singers. Yes, Carry, that Harland has done us a good turn."

"And the hundred a-year—"

"Ha! let us do without that. Independence,

girl—a proper pride that scorns all advantages for ourselves.”

“A fine sentiment that might do for the stage,” says Mrs. Worcester; “think again—a hundred a-year to two poor starvelings like us.”

“It’s a lift, certainly,” he answers irresolutely, “but I don’t like to be paid to keep away from the girls. Still, a hundred a-year is a hundred a-year. What the devil shall we do?”

“Take it. We sell our daughters for it.”

“And Harland has the best of the bargain,” replies her husband; “he will find that out some day.”

“If he should marry again, and cast them off, Worcester?”

“Why, we will come back to them, if we are respectable enough.”

“We might try to live respectably and soberly,” with a sigh that shows what a hard trial it will be, “so as not to be a disgrace to them when they are young women.”

“Yes, that’s a good idea. And with you to *mind* me—why not?”

He confesses his own weakness without a blush, and she nods her head, and says—

“Why not, indeed!”

“And if—if Harland likes them, and makes them his heiresses,” adds Worcester, “for I fancy that is the story of their lives, why—”

“Why, we will keep away for ever from their greatness,” says Mrs. Worcester, sternly.

“Amen—I think we see our way ahead, then.”

So this strange couple—these odd philosophers—appear to settle the matter, and seem prepared for every change, for all the contingencies which so great a change will bring to them.

But as the days decrease, there is a restlessness, and excitability hidden from each other, which their daughters see and share with them.

Eunice and Damaris have thought of their future also, have consulted father and mother, have declined, accepted, proposed a compromise, and finally have agreed at their parents’ wish to go.

They are old enough to know what is best for themselves; they have a dream or two in their minds concerning the future also, and those with whom they are about to part; they are to a certain extent philosophers, like their parents. They have lived the life of the vagrants,

and are in advance of their years ; they are thoughtful women at times, and to the thoughts of bettering their condition they are resigned at last. Not without a struggle, for there has been love in the midst of this family, and its members have worked side by side, borne privations, sickness, hunger together, shared the applause of the crowd, the scorn of not a few, seen the world, and suffered from contact with its hard corners.

Mrs. Worcester, all philosophy to her husband, becomes the reckless, dissatisfied woman to her children as the days grow less between them. The decision has been made known to Mr. Harland at last, and the news comes back that in the evening the children will be fetched away !

Mrs. Worcester, albeit a woman with some virtues, is at her worst then. She has made up her mind to see no more of her girls—she has promised not to see them again, without Mr. Harland's permission, which will not be granted whilst they remain children ; when they are young woman she will not be able to face them, and facing them, she will find them proud, cold, and repellent. They will

have been taught to look down upon her by that time!

“You are glad to go, Damaris?” she says, fretfully; “you never did care for us and our way of living. This is an escape!”

Damaris is not demonstrative. She makes no indignant denial of her mother’s assertion she is self-possessed in her way, and is very thoughtful to the end.

“We shall be able to help you better, when there are better chances for us.”

“You don’t think that you are losing us for good—you don’t fret about that!”

“Oh! it is not for good,” answers Damaris; “I don’t see that I am of much use to you—I have never been of any use.”

“Why, your voice was everything to us, Damaris,” says her father here; “we should not have got on without your voice, or turned in so many fourpenny pieces. Take care of it—it may be of help to you when other things fail, after all.”

“Ah! talk to her about the profession,” Mrs. Worcester says, ironically; “we all know how *your* voice got you on in the world, when you wanted to live by it.”

"My dear—I think, under present circumstances, we'll drop that subject."

"We have enough to think about, without it. Now, you girls." She beckons them to her again, and begins to talk rapidly and with no small excitement. She has a long, bony throat, and a something runs up and down within it as she speaks, and is perceptible to her observers.

"Now, you girls," she says, with much gesticulation, "whether you're sorry or glad, does not matter much. I hope you're sorry for us, Eunice—glad for yourself. Damaris I never could make out; she's not like other children. I don't believe she'll be like other women. But you mustn't go away without advice, whatever I think, or whatever both of us, father and mother, may feel. Don't forget—"

"Mother, we are not likely to forget you," cries Eunice, as Mrs. Worcester pauses; "we are not babies—we shall always remember—we shall come back."

"God forbid!" cries the mother; "that's all nonsense—don't think of that, whatever I may have said. We don't want you back—back to poverty, with fine notions in your head; why you had better not go away at all."

“Well, we will make our fortunes, and you shall come to us, mother,” is the quick consolation.

“Ah! that’s better, Eunice; think of that—try for that!” says the mother, with excitement. “I was going to advise you about that, when you interrupted me, as you always do. I never, in all my life, was allowed to speak my mind, without interruption! You, girls, will see Mr. Harland in time; don’t forget that he is your uncle, and that he is very rich and can make you so. There, there, never mind about me or your father, either of you. You must find your father in the man who is about to give you a chance. He’s not a very hard man, after all; he can’t be. I mind the time when he was a generous and kind body, if a little odd in his way always. You two pay him every respect—follow his wishes in everything; learn all that you can at school; try all that you can to forget the past and us, and become ladies—real ladies, worthy of the man who takes you from us, and pushes us back like a—like a wise man, of course! He’s quite right—I don’t say a word against him, mind—he’s been very kind to think of us at all, to save you two at least. Worcester,

you fool ! why don't you say something, instead of sitting on that table swinging your legs about ? ”

Mr. Worcester looks piteously towards her.

“ Don't ask me to do anything,” he says, “ I'm not in the humour—I'm knocked over, clean. I didn't think it would be quite so hard a job to part with them for their good ; it's only thinking what they are, and what they would have grown up with us, that satisfies me ; or, by God ! we would all four make a bolt of it at once ! ”

“ You can't expect our feelings to be studied very much,” his wife remarks.

“ Well—no.”

“ Then hold your tongue, and don't try to unsettle these two children. You don't find me grumbling, Worcester ; I'm made of granite.”

“ It has often struck me so. You never made proper allowances for human weakness—you understand, but don't sympathize with human nature—a curious woman rather. And Damaris is going, who used to take my part when you were a trifle too hard ; and Eunice, who was clever at creating a diversion and

changing the old subject to a new one; both whisked away at once, and we two left to fight it out together."

His under-lip quivers, and Mrs. Worcester says sharply:

"To fight on together now, Worcester, proud of the sacrifice we make for the good of these outcasts."

Damaris suddenly touches her mother's arm, and whispers:

"You will take care of him?"

"Why—what do you mean by that? Haven't I always?"

"Yes; but in a different way now, you know."

"I stop behind to take care of him, Damaris. Worcester," to her husband, "you hear what this girl is talking about?"

"No; I don't hear."

Mrs. Worcester tells him; and he suddenly puts the worn sleeve of his coat before his eyes, and sobs so hard, that Damaris runs to him, no longer cold and passive.

"Ask me to stay, father, and I will! I don't care for myself in this any more than Eunice does; and if you can't bear that I shall go, why

let me stay behind. Eunice will grow up a lady for all our sakes, and be our friend in time, when she can be, and when we want her."

"No, no; let me be. It's all right, we'll all try it. When it don't suit, or I can't get on with your—without you," he corrects, "we can fall back to our old positions on the instant. It is worth a trial, and I am all right enough."

"And here's the carriage," says Mrs. Worcester, "two carriages, surely! He said they were to be parted, these two girls, and they're going away at once to separate schools."

"That's what the boxes on the roof mean, mother," says Eunice. "Oh! I think we might have been trusted together, Damaris and I."

"That's that man Searle's doings,—he's as suspicious as his master, and as cold-hearted in his experiments. I don't like him," mutters Mrs. Worcester.

"I fancy he thinks that Damaris will get on better without me. Damaris is his favourite already!" says Eunice, thoughtfully.

"Why he has never said a word to me; and, like mother, I don't like him," Damaris replies.

"Hush, hush, don't repeat that!" cries the

mother, "he is the man who has the ear of Mr. Harland, and can thwart us at every turn. You must try and like him too. He means well, I daresay."

"He don't like me," explains Eunice, "because I told him stories when he first came here, and I wanted to make the best of it; but—"

A knock at the door, and a head peering into the room, after the summons from within to enter.

"Are the young ladies ready?" asks the head.

"Yes; just ready," says Mrs. Worcester; "have you any message for us?"

"Yes; a letter from Mr. Harland."

Mrs. Worcester opens the letter, glances at its contents, and then crumples it in her hand and consigns it to the depths of her pocket.

"A hundred instructions from Mr. Searle,—the rules by which we have promised to abide, and which he has drawn up in black and white at Mr. Harland's dictation, and has kept a copy of, he tells us," she explains, looking at her husband, who nods his head over the shoulder of Damaris whom he holds in his arms.

"There, go now, girls," says Mrs. Worcester,

hysterically, "and do the best for yourselves that you can. We can have your addresses when we like and we feel discontented, they say; so if we're, we're very unhappy, we can fetch you back and begin the singing at the fairs and races again. Eunice," she cries in a higher key as her arms close round the younger daughter, "you will be stronger, wiser than Damaris,—keep her strong, and keep her pride down,—see after her; love her for ever when you are sisters again, and those cruel people will let you meet. I said forget us if you could; but don't do that, girl! Don't grow too proud to think of us, and what we have given up for both your sakes. After all, we haven't been so very unhappy, considering, and we may be all together again, years hence. I'll pray to God so, to-night,—will you?"

"Yes, yes; with all my heart."

"Not together as we have been; not like that, of course. In any way but that. Oh! if we should never see each other again,—but we shall, we must! It isn't natural to give up everything for the sake of a better position; and, thank God, we shall hear of you, know how you are, and where you are. Why don't

you go away now!" she cries, impatiently. "Where's Damaris? Has she so much to say to the father, and nothing to me!"

Damaris is in her arms at this appeal, and Eunice passes to her father.

"You never loved me as Eunice did," says the mother, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Yes, yes; but you loved Eunice best," explains Damaris, "and he wanted love and pity very much, and so I turned to him. Poor father, what will he do?"

"Leave him to me, Damaris. I will do my best. I have always been the best of wives."

"Heigho!—yes."

"Good-bye. God bless you both in your new lives, and keep you good," sobs forth the mother; "this is a hard parting, but for the best,—the very best. In the future, not a word of the past life to any one. Mr. Harland's nieces—not our children any—any more! Worcester, you're like a baby, and I'm—I'm heartily ashamed of you."

So the parting comes at last—is over; and the children of the Worcesters,—the support of the Elvani family—have passed away to

their new lives, leaving husband and wife alone in the world.

Is the parting for a few years, or for all time?

Mr. Worcester thinks the latter.

"I don't believe," he says, as he steps from the high road into the house again, "that we shall ever set eyes on them again."

BOOK II.

D A M A R I S.

CHAPTER I.

MR. HARLAND IS HIMSELF AGAIN.

SEVEN years in a book is a longer stride than seven years in a life. In the life we look back and sigh, "Can it be so long ago?" Over the book we shake our heads and say, "This is too great a lapse of time, and this is beginning again, just as we have settled down to our scenes and our characters." And yet both but the turning of a page: yesterday, but children; to-day, in the front of life, looking out for life's prizes, ah! and with children of our own to think about. And this not the beginning again of our story, reader, but the first chapter of our story proper.

Seven years, then, since the Elvani family were broken up for good, and our characters drifted separate ways—since Damaris and Eunice were offered their chances of better-

ing themselves, and accepted not unwillingly those offers—since young Mat Ranwick was sent to a finishing school at the expense of a man somewhat grateful for past attention to his son—since Mr. Harland gained sixteen thousand pounds for damages in a railway accident—since Mr. Searle left for the Brazils, and the Worcesters, *père et mère*, for the outer darkness into which Mr. Harland's ultimatum had consigned them—since all these and more of our characters sniffed the sea-breeze from the tall cliffs at Westbourne.

Seven years afterwards,—almost to the day, for it was the end of September—when Mr. Harland gave his dinner-party in Eaton Square. It was rather a grand dinner-party, with some style about it, though simply the dinner of a city man who had waxed fat with profit and migrated west.

There were no celebrities at this dinner—Mr. Harland knew no celebrities, and detested people who were popular and poor. He did not want rank, science, or art, poetry, painting, or belles lettres represented at his feasts; he had no sympathy with anything but commerce, and they were men of commerce whom

he had summoned to his table that night,—that dark, dreary night in September, when the winter seemed to have come before its time into the square, to nip at the calves of the coachmen and footmen waiting their masters' pleasure to leave the good wines of Reuben Harland, or the good wives and daughters of city men in that drawing-room above stairs.

A grand dinner-party it had been—for we come in at the dessert, after the ladies have retired—but purely a business affair, under the rose. Therefore, to a certain extent, an odd assemblage of men who dealt largely with the house of Harland, and who might, perhaps, be tempted to make rash bargains, after drinking deeply of Mr. Harland's wine. Not asked to trade in any way, however—asked out of friendship for the matter of that, and to bring their wives, sons, and daughters—but business not tabooed if any individual pleased to start the topic. They were talking of business everywhere over the dessert, bright-eyed, eager-faced men, who always went out with their “shop” to dinner, and loved to talk of shop at all times and seasons, and were but happy huckstering.

Mr. Harland had probably made his dinner-party pay, for the gentleman on his right was talking of tens of thousands, and Mr. Harland was entering something in his note-book. Mr. Harland dealt in everything Brazilian, was great in Brazilian diamonds, was a large holder of Brazilian bonds and Brazilian stock of all kinds, discounted bills for out-of-the-way people at Brazil, and was rumoured to have a great deal to do with Brazilian banks, mines, and railways.

Mr. Harland had altered for the better since the old days at Westbourne. Mr. Harland was himself again; almost the man whom city folk and Mr. Searle knew, but whom our readers do not, before the accident crushed him and killed his son. A man with rather a saturnine expression of countenance still as he sat at the head of the table, but with quick, bead-like eyes, that were wonderful in their powers of observance. Quick eyes, allied to hands that were never still, but which drummed upon the table, took up nutcrackers, dessert knives, and wine glasses, strayed through his scanty black hair—Mr. Harland had grown “thin on the top”—went frequently to his under-

lip and chin, where on one or another they hovered nervously until a fresh attraction presented itself. He had been a very quick and bustling man at forty years of age and till the time of his accident—and that rapidity was now confined to the upper extremities, for he had never gained the free use of his legs, and there was an unpleasant drag about them when he rose and made his way with difficulty across a room. Still he had changed vastly for the better since the Westbourne days, and that apathy which had marked his character at the time, and which, warned by his doctor, he had fought hard to assume, was no longer part and parcel of his new existence. He was the long-headed, keen-sighted Mr. Harland again in business life—and his life was nearly all business now; he had nothing else to live for, he told people caustically sometimes, although people of late years did not implicitly believe him. He was careful of his money still, proud of himself and his position, sceptical of human good, and rather more suspicious than ever of human motives, and there, with a few eccentricities to be hereafter recorded, hangs our portrait of Reuben Harland at the age of forty-seven.

It was not till the wines were low in the decanters for the third time, and even business talk was flagging, that Mr. Harland suggested that they should join the ladies. All healths had been drunk—nearly every guest had had an especial toast to his credit, and there was nothing more to stop for. One or two of the guests were red about the eyelids, but still went steadily enough upstairs. Mr. Harland walked unsteadily and painfully, although he had imbibed nothing but claret since the cloth had been removed—but he had walked thus for six years and a half, and had been grateful for that privilege after nine months' Bath chairs, and footmen carrying him up and down stairs like a Guy Fawkes. Not quite so grateful now, perhaps, for he had become used to his better estate, and even inclined to consider it hard that he could not walk about as freely as other men, and enjoy life like the rest of his species.

A tall young man, singularly handsome and singularly well-dressed, though he wore but the full-dress livery that the age required, stepped towards him before he had made many paces to the door, and offered him his arm.

“Thank you, Matthew, I can manage for myself,” he said, with a less degree of harshness in his voice than usual. “I shall be in the drawing-room in good time—quite time enough for me. Where’s my nephew?”

“A little way ahead, sir.”

“He is more of a lady’s man than you are, Matthew.”

“I don’t know, sir,” answered the other with a laugh. “I am rather fond of ladies after business hours.”

“Ay—after business hours—not before. I don’t think that I need blame either Edwin or yourself for neglecting business for the women. That’s a good sign too. Matthew.”

“Mr. Harland.”

“I think I’ll take your arm—the cursed stairs are tiresome after all, and I’ve been down them to-day once more than usual,” he said, laying a thin kite’s-claw of a hand upon the young man’s arm; “now then, and don’t take such infernal strides.”

Upstairs the rich man and the rich man’s clerk—for that is their degree of business relationship—proceeded together, the visitors flowing on in front towards the lighted room,

whence the music of a piano welled forth melodiously.

"I expected Mr. Searle to dinner to-night, but he hasn't come, Matthew," said Mr. Harland, as they continued their slow way. "The ship was sighted yesterday."

"I hope that he has left everything satisfactory at Rio Janeiro," said Matthew.

"He would not have left without, you may be sure," replied the employer.

"I suppose not."

"I haven't seen that fellow for nearly seven years," mused Mr. Harland; "for seven years has he been making money for us in Brazil, and working our branch in good fashion. I don't know a business man whose example I can better recommend you to follow than Lewis Searle's, take it all together."

"I will do my best to imitate him, Mr. Harland. With a fair copy before me, I dare say that I shall succeed in life."

"Be steady, persevering, quiet, and you are sure to succeed in our business. I will see, Matthew, that you do succeed."

"Ah! sir—you are more than good, or just to me."

"Yes—that's very likely," was the dry response.

"I do not suppose that I should know Mr. Searle again," said young Matthew Ranwick—for it was that gentleman who was a guest in Mr. Harland's grand house. "I have a faint remembrance of a wiry, dark-faced man, with piercing eyes."

"Eyes that pierce like fate—I never liked them," muttered Mr. Harland; "still, a good servant and worth copying. Not in his manners, for they are abominably abrupt; not in his temper, for I consider it upon the whole a bad one and an aggravating one; but simply and purely in his business habits. You will see him very frequently at the office after this; he will be your master, for the present, Matthew, and you must be humble and obedient."

"Trust me."

"Searle likes obedience—I wonder whether seven years have altered him very much! An odd, unpleasant beggar after business, and therefore I'm not particularly sorry that he has not come to dinner; but in business, remember, Matthew Ranwick, the model that I recommend you."

Matthew Ranwick bowed. Any recommendation of Mr. Harland's it would be the young man's greatest pleasure to follow, was implied by that reverent inclination of the head.

Certainly a striking couple as they passed into the drawing-room together, their contiguity the cause of much whispering as they advanced. The thin, spare, sallow man, creeping slowly, and by the aid of a stick and his clerk's arm to his place, a contrast in everything to the tall, well-shapen youth of one-and-twenty at his side.

The room was full of light and life; the dresses of the ladies were rich and costly, as befitted the better halves of city merchants, and there were diamonds enough for all Brazil in head-dresses, necklaces, and ear-rings. If Mr. Harland did not mix in "good society," at least he mixed in society that could buy up half the estates of those "stuck-ups" who sneered at wholesale bargainers.

Matthew Ranwick saw his principal to an easy chair that had been placed for him near the fire burning in its grate of ormolu and steel, and then seemed to stand on tiptoe for an instant, as if by elevating himself above the

heads of the assembled company, he might perceive more clearly the proper course to follow, or the proper person to whom his inclination might direct him.

Yes, a handsome man enough—bright in his youth and strength, and with a face that envious men might covet. Not a face so strictly handsome, that its features would bear that uncomfortable process of “picking to pieces,” in which lady critics are wont to indulge as they sit at the side-scenes of society, with their friends parading before them, but a face that struck people with its expression as well as its good looks. It was a keen face—the nose was straight and thin, the eyes were somewhat deep set, but were earnest, large grey eyes that observed a great deal, and were indicative of a great amount of penetration; the forehead was broad and massive, and surmounted by a mass of waving brown hair, which might have been more fashionable had it been cut more short, and would have become a poet’s head better than a merchant’s clerk. The lips were too thin perhaps, for perfection, and the chin too sharp, but the complexion of the man was so radiant, and the whole face seemed lit up with so much

intelligence, that few were the strangers there who did not whisper at first sight of him, "Who's that? Who is he?"

He was perfectly at home in Eaton Square; he was a man who made himself at home anywhere, it might have been perceived; probably a man who, with a very good opinion of himself and his abilities, considered himself a match for most men whom he encountered. He was a young man, too, who had begun life early for himself, and was at his office desk at seventeen years of age; he had succeeded in pleasing his master and superiors by his energy and general aptitude for business, and he wore that peculiar look of general confidence, which early beginners who have faith in themselves habitually wear. Certainly, no nervousness, no reserve, no awkwardness in the face of society were to be seen in Matthew Ranwick.

The ladies whispered concerning him as he made his way through the crowded drawing-room: a few old ones were satirical, and a few more full of wonder at Mr. Harland's fancy. One young lady, tall, stately, and beautiful,—a brilliant brunette as the phrase runs,—seemed glad to see him again as he advanced and addressed

a few words to her, cutting in, somewhat uncere-
 moniously perhaps, upon a conversation that
 she had been holding with a very thin, middle-
 sized, flaxen-haired young man, who was great
 in diamond studs and who evidently had the re-
 sponsibility of his shirt front upon his mind.
 Meanwhile a tall man, swarthy enough for an
 Indian, and with hair, eyebrows, and thin
 moustache as black as night, had suddenly ap-
 peared in evening dress at the door of the
 drawing-room, had looked round for an instant
 as though taking stock of the guests, and then
 had dropped into a seat near the door, and
 commenced a series of the most alarming
 yawns, hidden from general observation by the
 voluminous skirts of a lady in blue silk, above
 which rose a fair, fat, white back and a head-
 dress of Valenciennes.

He yawned perceptibly at last, and gave
 vent to a low, long kind of wail, that startled
 the blue silk in advance.

"Oh! dear, what's that," ejaculated the
 wearer, and veering gracefully round, a well-
 preserved lady of forty looked down upon the
 tall man in the chair before her.

"Bless me! is it—is it, Mr. Searle?" she asked

and then, sure of her identity, she extended one gloved hand towards him. Mr. Searle rose and bowed over it like a gentleman of the old school, smiling very faintly at the recognition.

"Welcome back again to England, Mr. Searle."

"Thank you, Mrs. Courtenay."

"What a traveller you are, to be sure!—to-day in England, yesterday in an out-of-the-way quarter of the world amongst savages and man-eaters. I often wish that I was a man, that I might travel from pole to pole, Mr. Searle."

"And see the man-eaters? Well, they are pretty sights."

"Have you spoken to my brother-in-law yet?"

"Not yet. I was resting after a long journey, Mrs. Courtenay, and I thought Mr. Harland's greeting would keep for awhile. I don't know why I have come to-night. I'm not fond of a *soirée fantastique*."

"A what?" inquired Mrs. Courtenay.

"Mr. Harland mentioned the affair in a flying note to me, yesterday," he said in a dreamy manner, and without replying to her question; "and here I am."

“How long have you been in England?”

“We touched at an English seaport yesterday evening.”

“And you have been away seven years? How pleased you must be to come back to your native land!”

“I was born in the Brazils,” he said quietly.

“Ah! yes. I had forgotten. But this is like your native land, of course. This is the home of your adoption—of the brave and the free.”

“It’s a decent kind of place; but I am more used to the Brazils, though it’s very doubtful if I return there ever again. Will you take this seat?”

“Thank you, no.”

“Well, with your permission, I will,” he said, reseating himself. “Now if I could get forty winks quietly here, just to sleep off the rattle, rattle of the train, I should be as bright as day again.”

“You don’t want to sleep here, Mr. Searle?” inquired the lady.

“Well, to compose myself, then. Travel upsets one’s ideas.”

“I used to fancy that you were always composed,” said Mrs. Courtenay.

"I was vain of being thought cool and collected, that was all. Now, less disturbs me than it used; but then, I am getting grey and old fashioned."

Mrs. Courtenay glanced at his black hair, and he laughed for the first time.

"Upon my word, the grey lines are streaking me, though I have artfully disposed of them this evening, as Rachel might have done for me had I left home before coming here."

"Who's Rachel?" suddenly asked Mrs. Courtenay, in evident surprise.

"And so the ravages that the enemy makes upon us are hidden with consummate tact," continued Mr. Searle, without paying any heed to her interrogative again; "we both wear pretty well for middle-aged people, perhaps."

"My gracious! what a remark."

"In you, I don't see that difference which seven years have made in me; but you don't smoke hard, and you haven't been worried by business or dried up by suns that blaze unmercifully over the other side. Only the natural thickness of my head has saved me from a sun-stroke, I believe."

"You don't look more than your age, Mr.

Searle," said Mrs. Courtenay, suddenly taking a seat that had been vacated by his side, "for all your travels and anxieties."

"Not anxieties," he corrected, "for I make a point never to have any."

"How can you help them?"

"I can't have them," he reiterated, "the whole thing is an impossibility."

"Can't have troubles!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay, wonderingly; "my dear sir, it is very profane to talk like that!"

"None the less true, despite the profanity," said Mr. Searle; "who's that little swell with the diamonds, bobbing about on tiptoe like a ballet-master?"

"That's my son Edwin," said Mrs. Courtenay, with emphasis and dignity.

"Oh! I beg pardon," answered Mr. Searle. "I was not aware of that, or I should not have put so rude a question to you. Shall I turn it into a compliment?"

"How can you?"

"Why, to be a swell, implies a high position in society,—a position that impresses observers; and ballet-masters are the perfection of grace, and so we come round to the sublime."

"Ah," said Mrs. Courtenay, fluttering her fan, "I don't understand you, quite. You were always fond of riddles, and I never could make out when you were in jest or earnest."

"Life's a jest,—I'm a funny man, or," he corrected, "perhaps I am used up, like Sir Charles Coldstream."

"Or been cruelly treated in your youth, like Byron's Lara?"

Mr. Searle flinched. That was the one home-thrust which he seemed to feel that evening, although he answered very coolly the next instant,—

"Or have cruelly treated other people, like Byron's Manfred,—or have had a wife that would not behave herself, like Kotzebue's Stranger; but pray don't think me a man with a mystery, Mrs. Courtenay. I object to individuals in cloaks, on the stage or off it. To think that I should have come all these miles to tell you that, this evening! To walk into Mr. Harland's house in Eaton Square for the news of the day and to gain a comprehensive view of things in general, and then to sit down in a corner with you, of all women in the world, and talk about myself!"

"It is strange," said Mrs. Courtenay, "why don't you go to Mr. Harland and hear the news then?"

"Want of inclination, I suppose. I shall have enough of Mr. Harland presently. Tell me all the news yourself, please, whilst these people are standing about and hiding me from the master."

"The news of the last seven years?"

"The saints forbid," cried Mr. Searle, "no; the news of the day—give me the general position of affairs here, and then let me slip out at the door and go home. I am not disposed for company to-night."

"Only for the company of a middle-aged woman like me," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"Ah! you speak bitterly," answered this strange man; "you are not repining at middle age—looking back regretfully at the youth that has left you?"

"Why should I?" said she. "It was not a happy youth—it was full of disappointments."

"Still, you might regret it; if mis-spent, for instance."

"Was your youth spent wisely?" was the quick retort here.

“Yes ; I think it was,” replied Mr. Searle.
“Now, will you oblige me with the news ?”

“Oh ! certainly.”

Mrs. Courtenay tossed her luxuriant ringlets,
and began.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. COURTENAY TELLS THE NEWS.

“I DARESAY you know the news as well as I do,” she commences; “you have not been employed all these years in Mr. Harland’s service—at home and abroad—without knowing all that appertains to the business.”

“I have tried to know all.”

“You know that Mr. Harland has serious thoughts of taking my Edwin into partnership?”

“Yes,” he answered slowly, “the news has reached me even in Brazil—when will the affair come off?”

“When Edwin is twenty-two, or thereabouts.”

“He will step into a splendid position with ease and grace,” remarked Mr. Searle. “I hope that he will do justice to the house.”

"He is clever, don't you think?"

"I can't say; I have had no business connection with your son; he entered the house after I had left England. That is your son with the studs, you say?"

"Yes; that is he," said Mrs. Courtenay, crossly; "why do you keep alluding to his studs?"

"What is his salary?"

"Four hundred a-year."

"Mr. Harland is extremely liberal with his relations. Four hundred a-year—well, I hope he's worth it."

"Sir!"

"And which is Mr. Ranwick—is that gentleman here this evening?"

"Yes; that is Mr. Ranwick, talking to Mr. Harland's niece."

"And which is the niece?"

"The tall, dark-eyed girl by the piano."

"Oh! indeed; and that is Mr. Ranwick? well, he has a fine head of his own."

"It was a very lucky day for him when his godfathers and godmothers christened him Matthew," said Mrs. Courtenay, between her teeth.

"Yes ; I daresay. Ranwick—Matthew Ranwick. Ah ! I remember now the beginning of the story. I used to wonder in Brazil where I had heard the name."

"Mr. Harland took him into the office when he had finished his schooling, and pushed him forward—actually put him over the head of my Edwin, till I remonstrated, and Edwin remonstrated. The notice that Mr. Harland takes of Mr. Ranwick is absurd and ludicrous. I cannot understand it."

"A shrewd, clever young fellow, certainly."

"How do you know ?"

"He conducts the correspondence department—I have had many letters from him—short, crisp, and to the purpose, without any circumlocution ; a regular business man, young Ranwick."

Mrs. Courtenay did not like to hear this praise. It was evident that the name of Ranwick was already distasteful to her, and she writhed perceptibly beneath Louis Searle's encomiums.

"I don't know much about business," she said ; "we do not come of a business family. His manners are obtrusive—painfully obtrusive in society."

"Poor society!" moaned Mr. Serale.

Mrs. Courtenay half rose to leave Mr. Searle to himself after this; altered her intention, and sat down again.

"You are aware that he will probably be taken into partnership at the same time?" she said, spitefully. "Mr. Harland is not slow to reward faithful servants."

"No; a little too quick, possibly," replied Mr. Searle, swinging one of his kid gloves by the tips of its fingers, and looking steadily at the carpet, "but the firm wants new blood in it, and Harland, Ranwick, and Courtenay is not a bad sounding name."

"Courtenay last, of course!"

"Courtenay and Ranwick can toss up for precedence; and Ranwick being in luck's way, will win. Now for Mr. Harland's niece?"

"You know all about her, as well as about the business, I daresay. What is the good of asking me for news?"

"News domestic is never imparted to me. Everything concerning Miss Worcester will be genuine news indeed."

"Miss Harland she is called here."

"Miss Harland—ah! proceed, please."

"My brother-in-law went a long way out of his road to find this niece."

"How long has she been here?"

"Three years now. Why, would you believe it, she has been at school for several years before that,—finishing at his expense?"

Mr. Searle tried to look astonished.

"And there's another one, but Mr. Harland don't like her at all, and seldom asks her to his house."

"Where is she?"

"Oh! I don't know now—I have not inquired," answered Mrs. Courtenay. "One of the nieces is quite enough to be interested in. The mother, you must know, made a low marriage, and is not recognized by her brother, who is proud enough when he likes—and this girl will probably become my brother's heiress, if she play her cards as well to the end as she has done from the beginning. I detest time-serving, even in relations."

"It is a bad sign of the hollowness of the age, and yet you wonder why I dislike the world. So Damaris plays her cards well."

"How did you know her name was Damaris?"

"It is familiar to me in some way. What

an annoyance this sudden appearance of the next of kin must have caused you?"

"It would have done so, had I been building on Mr. Harland's money," said Mrs. Courtenay. "Thank God I have money enough of my own, and to spare."

"That's something to be grateful for in these days."

"Ah! it is,—my poor husband died a wealthy man and placed me above the necessity of coveting my neighbours' goods," said Mrs. Courtenay, placidly.

"Damaris is likely to be Mr. Harland's heiress then?"

"Damaris is her uncle's companion, friend, and favourite; she is at the head of affairs here. Judging by appearances she may come in for his money, but Mr. Harland is eccentric."

"Very."

"I don't know what all these people see in her, unless it is her expectations. She's not pretty; she's too big."

Mrs. Courtenay was below the middle height of women.

"Pretty is scarcely the word for a girl so majestic and beautiful."

“Beautiful!—why you are like all the men. Some one has told you that she is a beautiful girl, and you believe it.”

“I generally disbelieve what I am told.”

“Or you are influenced, like the men again, by Damaris Harland’s own opinion of herself; she is the proudest minx in England, I believe. Proud, ill-tempered, and fickle, and yet run after like this.”

Mrs. Courtenay opened her fan with a suddenness that startled Mr. Searle, and commenced fluttering it rapidly to and fro. Mr. Harland’s niece was a long way from the good graces of Mr. Harland’s sister-in-law. The gentleman at her side coolly remarked the fact.

“You dislike Miss Harland?”

“I am a woman of strong likes and dislikes,” was the reply. “I dislike any one who treats *me* with incivility, and whom I cannot understand.”

“And you do not understand me, despite my ingenuousness,” exclaimed Mr. Searle. “And here I have been monopolizing your attention all this while. It is too bad of me!”

He rose with alacrity, and before she could reply, if she had had an intention of replying,

he was making his way through the crowd to Mr. Harland's side. He had forgotten his intention of leaving the party after hearing all the news, or he was not satisfied with that modicum of news which the fates had allowed his late companion to afford him. He had come from Brazil, and was longing for further information.

"Now I wonder whether I like or dislike you," muttered Mrs. Courtenay, as she looked after her late companion. "Edwin," she called to the young man who had already been a subject for conversation that evening. Edwin, who was passing, stopped at her appeal.

"I am going as soon as the carriage is ordered."

"The guests are not thinning yet, mamma."

"These people never know when to go," said Mrs. Courtenay, peevishly. Meanwhile Mr. Searle had appeared before his employer at last.

"Good evening, Mr. Harland."

"Ah! Searle, good evening to you."

This was the greeting of two men who had not met for seven years. The taller man with the swarthy face stood with his hands clasped

before him looking down at the principal, and the principal heaped in the chair, and with his head sunk between his shoulders as though he was a hunchback, looked at him askance from beneath his eyebrows.

“I expected you to dinner, Searle.”

“I have hardly found time to pay my respects to you at all.”

“Have you just arrived?”

“Half-an-hour ago or so. I have been hearing all the news from your sister.”

“Sister; what sister?” asked Mr. Harland, peremptorily.

“Mrs. Courtenay.”

“Oh!” he replied. “Yes, she is a good hand at news. Insufferably communicative, in fact.”

“You can put up with her now?”

“Yes. I am a different man, Searle.”

“I congratulate you.”

“I used to think that I should never get over my accident; and then the loss of my son to follow that, but I have battled through it somehow.”

“You should be grateful for your better estate.”

"I am."

"That's well."

"About the railway at Brazil, Searle?" said Mr. Harland, looking up at him more intently; "safe and sound, and progressive?"

"Yes. Shall we talk of business to-morrow? There are a great many people with long ears about to-night."

"Do you mean that they are asses?" asked Harland quickly, "or spies upon us?"

"A few of both species, I daresay. Shall you be at the office to-morrow?"

"I am there every day."

"Every day!—why you are the vigorous, persevering, business man again, then, in all respects?"

"In all respects."

"The same man whom I met in Brazil, with whom I came to London years ago, before a railway accident nearly shook the life from him?"

"I have gone back to my old self completely."

"I thought once that you would have become a different man. I left you somewhat different at Westbourne."

"I wish that you would not talk of Westbourne; I hate the very name of the place."

"It restored you to health."

"Such health as it is," said Mr. Harland, ungratefully.

"Ah, such as it is," echoed Mr. Searle, almost contemptuously, in his turn.

"Have you seen young Ranwick?" asked Harland. "He's very clever—just the fellow we wanted in our business. I do not remember any one getting on so rapidly as he has."

"A genius for finance?"

"I think he is. Shall I introduce—"

"I will introduce myself—I would prefer it," interrupted his manager. "We have corresponded on business affairs for two years, and there need be no formality between two old servants of a famous house. He is talking to your niece, I think?"

"Yes, that is Mr. Ranwick."

"Your niece Damaris," added Searle. "I never asked the question, but it struck me that I should find both nieces here."

"One is quite enough," said Mr. Harland, drily. "The other is provided for. This one understands me better—much better, Searle. She realizes her position, and is intensely grateful for the salvation that I have been to her."

Her teachers have made a lady of her—a perfect lady, and it is pleasant to see her in the house. I like the girl—she does credit to me.”

He rubbed one thin hand over the other, and chuckled softly to himself, more like an old man in his dotage, than the sharp Mr. Harland whom the City of London respected.

“I did my duty by my relatives,” he said slowly. “Ninety-nine out of every hundred would have let them go their way; but I acted generously to the lot of them, and I have not had much cause to regret it. Thank Heaven, Searle—they may thank Heaven too, for the matter of that—that I’m a just man.”

“‘And not as other men are,’” quoted Mr. Searle.

“Exactly,” answered the rich man, who did not see the force of the quotation, or guess that Mr. Searle had offered a text to his notice.

Mr. Searle stood for some time longer by the side of his master, listening to Mr. Harland’s self-gratulations, and starting no topic of his own. Once or twice he seemed to pay more than extra attention, or be attracted by something in the manner of the speaker, for he looked down at him very steadily—with a

concentrative gaze almost—when Mr. Harland was looking at the carpet. Despite this study, as it might be, of the principal, Mr. Searle was an observer of things around him. Very little seemed to escape him within his range of vision. No one passed, but this man, who cared not for the world or anybody in it—this polite Timon of a new society—glanced for an instant at the passer-by, occasionally bowing as he recognized an old business face, to which he brought a look of wonderment, as a rule, for his attention—for seven years test short memories; and Mr. Searle, despite Mrs. Courtenay's past assertion, had changed a great deal, even looked older than the six-and-thirty years to which he owned.

The numbers had begun to thin perceptibly in Mr. Harland's drawing-room, when Mr. Searle left his employer's side, and went straight as an arrow to the side of Matthew Ranwick. What they said, or in what way Mr. Searle introduced himself, matters not to the progress of our story. Their talk was purely business talk, upon which the manager from Brazil had set an interdict in Mr. Harland's case—a free and easy interchange of business ideas between

two men serving one master, both looking fearlessly into each other's faces, and possibly studying each other. They were men who had corresponded a great deal together on matters of finance, and they were to meet daily in the great office and work together for the common weal; much depended upon their understanding each other, and working with amity together. Mr. Harland, from his easy chair, watched them attentively—even smiled to see them shake hands as they separated, Mr. Searle making for the door.

Mr. Harland beckoned to young Ranwick as Searle passed through the doorway.

"What do you think of him, Matthew?" he asked.

"That we shall agree very well together. A sensible, straightforward gentleman."

"Hum! A thorough man of business, at least," replied Mr. Harland. "I am very glad you like him. You will gain some valuable hints in business from that man."

"No doubt, sir."

"You—why, he has come back again!"

"Forgotten something, probably."

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Harland, with a per-

ceptible shudder. "That man never forgets."

"What a man for a business like ours, sir," said Ranwick.

"Yes—the very man."

Mr. Searle had returned. A second thought, not connected with the business, had arrested him at the top of the broad stairs, and taken him back, with rapid strides, into the drawing-room. A quick glance around him, as though to make sure that everything was in the position that he had left it, and then a sudden halt again.

Miss Harland had burst into song. To the few favoured guests remaining she had condescended to sing an Italian piece—the *finale* to Bellini's opera of *Sonnambula*. The guests clustered round the piano, Mr. Harland's face assumed an expression of satisfaction, Mr. Ranwick looked on admiringly—looked across at Searle even, for his admiration, who nodded towards him as though in assent to the general opinion.

Well, there was but one opinion to be entertained—Mr. Harland's niece was an accomplished soprano. Her voice rang out in clear,

melodious, nightingale fashion, as we hear now and then at the opera—never in private life, save by a miracle. A voice that would have made the fortune of Damaris in another and more exciting sphere, perhaps—wonderful in its flexibility, its range, its quality—more wonderful still in its execution.

Searle walked on tiptoe across the room to Mr. Harland again.

“Almost a genius,” he said.

“Quite,” was the reply.

“She must have studied hard, and had good masters.”

“She is always studying; she studies too much for any earthly purpose, I tell her,” answered Mr. Harland.

“She should have gone to Italy with that voice.”

“She has been.”

“A voice that is worth preserving,” said Mr. Searle, as he walked back again.

When the song was completed, and the guests had thanked Miss Harland, and still further thinned—when Mr. Harland was conversing with his future partner, Mr. Ranwick, once more, and four old gentlemen, who would

not go home, had sat down to a rubber of whist with four or five more stubborn ones to look on and put the players out with irrelevant remarks—when Miss Harland was for an instant alone, standing by the piano arranging some loose pieces of music together, Mr. Searle, swinging his crush hat in his hand, startled her a little by his propinquity.

A stare of well-bred surprise, haughty enough in its way for a duchess, and then Miss Harland was arranging her music again. This was a gentleman who had not been introduced to her, and whom she had never seen before,—her uncle's guest, probably—a late comer—but no one whom she knew.

“Good evening, Miss Worcester,” Mr. Searle said, gravely bowing. “I thought it scarcely polite of me to go away without wishing you good evening.”

CHAPTER III.

DAMARIS.

YES, Damaris had grown a beautiful woman. Far above the middle height of her sex, and carrying her stature with a queenly grace. She was the queen of Mr. Harland's mansion at all events, and one of whom Mr. Harland had fair cause to be proud; one of those young women who look well everywhere and in everything, adding grace to the adornments, rather than the adornments enhancing the attractions. A brunette with a dazzling complexion, that daylight even had no power to affect, a black-haired and large-eyed woman, who carried her head high in the world, and on whose face rested almost a natural haughtiness, that only vanished when a few favourites were near her. The face of a woman who thought—who thought of herself a great deal, no doubt, as

beauties will think, but who also thought of matters foreign to herself, or the expression would have been less lofty, less uncommon. Tall, graceful, beautiful, and richly dressed, and proud of all four advantages, it seemed to need some courage for a stranger to approach her; and Damaris gazed at Mr. Searle as though she thought it required a little explanation, even in her uncle's house and from a welcome guest there. Damaris evidently stood upon ceremony, and had not had years of "finishing" for nothing;—she almost looked down the intruder to begin with, though her colour varied as the old name met her ears.

"I have not the pleasure," she said, coldly regarding the gentleman who had addressed her thus unceremoniously.

"Pardon me, but you have," responded Mr. Searle.

A pair of delicately pencilled eyebrows were elevated at this contradiction, and Damaris for an instant seemed perplexed. She looked more intently at the speaker, and said—

"I really have not the honour, sir, at present."

This was a concession, implying that the

honour might follow in due course, if Mr. Searle attended to his P's and Q's, those valuable letters of the alphabet which he had neglected all his life.

"I take advantage of an introduction that is seven years old, at least," said Mr. Searle. "I will excuse Miss Worcester forgetting me and Stackford—me the messenger who brought good tidings to her."

Miss Worcester—despite Mr. Harland's wishes we shall call her by her own name when Damaris is not on the cards—changed colour at this. The red blood mounted to her neck and face, and stopped there for a time; the eyes were veiled by the long lashes; the hand that had been trifling with the music trembled very much; she had not been prepared for the past, or for so cruel an allusion thereto.

"Yes—I think that I know you now," she said in a low voice, and looking up at last with a womanly shyness that Mr. Harland's guests had never seen; "you are Mr. Searle?"

"The same. Are you sorry to see me?"

"I don't know why I should be sorry?"

"Or glad?" he added.

"Or glad," she repeated, with a slight smile

hovering on her lips as she took up his question; "and yet I am more glad than sorry."

"Well, *I* am glad to hear that, although at a loss for your reason."

"I cannot give you one, Mr. Searle," she said more abruptly, "unless it is that one more tried follower of my uncle's house is back in England."

"Shall we say that is the reason?" he asked, doubtfully.

"If you like."

"You are in your uncle's service, studying his interests with the rest of us. I thought that it would come to this, although I did not hold out any hopes, lest you and your sister, your father and your mother, should be disappointed."

"You thought so, then?"

"Yes. For Mr. Harland was a lonely man. But your sister?"

"Oh! she," colouring again strongly, "is in disgrace at present."

"What for?"

"I can't tell you exactly," she said; "it is not a story that would interest you. Have you left Brazil for good?"

The question was made so suddenly, and with so unmistakable an intention of turning the conversation, that Mr. Searle paused to consider it before making his reply.

"Yes," he answered at last; "and your father and mother, are they well?"

"I believe so," she said, hastily. "This branch house at Brazil, how will it get on without your supervision?"

"There's a clever fellow to take my place. Have you seen Mr. or Mrs. Worcester since that day at Stackford when the carriage whirled you away to greatness?"

"No, I have not," she said, driven to bay at last, and vexed at Mr. Searle's persistency; "why do you speak of the past to me? My uncle dislikes all mention of it—so do I."

"Why should you forget the past, Miss Worcester?"

"It is a disgraceful reminiscence, and I would live it down. I am under orders to forget it, and you are not Mr. Harland's friend, or mine, to put these questions to me."

"Miss Worcester, I am no man's friend," he answered.

It was the old assertion with which he

repelled all claims of friendship on him—which he always made irritably, as though the idea of himself and friendship were an insult that he could not brook. He spoke, too, as if he were proud of utter isolation—of standing apart from sympathy with his kind; a man above the weakness of affection, who had lived without faith for six-and-thirty years, and was going on fast to the end without any intention of swerving from his first hard purpose.

Damaris took no heed of his protest, though startled for an instant by the tone in which it had been uttered. She was excited by her own particular grievances—the slight that had been proffered her by thrusting this old objectionable past upon her in her bright estate. Erect and stately, with her head thrown back, and her face far less amiable than when he had looked into it a moment since, Damaris Worcester seemed the lady who was disposed to assert her dignity just then.

“Friend or enemy, you must not speak to me of *my* past, for it is interdicted here. I have outlived it; and you have no right to take advantage of your bitter knowledge to remind me of what I have been. I know it, sir, too well!”

“And yet so proud.”

“I have a right to be proud,” she said, with excitement; “pride keeps me strong.”

“You are proud of having risen in the world—that is an honest pride in its way,” murmured Mr. Searle.

“I don’t know that I am proud of that,” she answered, shortly; “at all events, do not give me credit for it.”

“An honest pride, when one’s own exertions have been the ladder to one’s own position,” added Mr. Searle; “otherwise it may be a sin,—at least, I think so,” he added.

“The evening is getting late,” murmured Damaris.

“I am keeping you, too,” he replied, thoughtfully regarding her for an instant. “I will bid you good night at once.”

“Good night,” said Damaris.

He had half extended his hand, but she had not noticed the movement, or had intentionally disregarded it. She was very cold and grave now in her demeanour; but the man before her was the last man in the world to be kept at a distance, when his inclination disposed him to be familiar. He was a man who took

no hints, and was dead to delicate impressions.

As he turned to go, he said in a low voice—

“I am sorry that you are trying hard to forget the past, and those connected with it. I think that you might have acted more wisely, and been all the better for the recollection.”

“I do not think that it is your place to school me, Mr. Searle,” she said coldly. “I know what is best. I have planned my actions out, and no one must interfere with them—you, least of all, for you have no claim upon me, and no right to speak.”

“Certainly not; I will ask you, Miss Worcester, to accept my apologies.”

He bowed very low—it was almost an ironical bow, she thought, or else she was strangely susceptible that night, and saw a hidden meaning in everything that he said and did. For an instant she was inclined to remind him that she had taken her uncle’s name with her new position in her uncle’s house; and then she turned away, and felt glad to escape him and his rude questioning, leaving to her uncle the task of reprimanding him when he stepped over the proprieties again.

He was the last guest but one that went out of the drawing-room door; the last held out his hand to her, and said—

“Good night, Miss Damaris—not fatigued, I trust, with all the arduous duties of the hostess?”

“No, Mr. Matthew; not fatigued at all. Very wakeful; very much inclined for an hour's hard practice at the piano after everybody has gone to bed to-night.”

“For heaven's sake, don't think of such a thing!” exclaimed her uncle.

Matthew Ranwick laughed pleasantly at Mr. Harland's fears, and then reiterating his good nights, he went his way with the rest. On the top step he found Mr. Searle busily employed in lighting his cigar.

“Ah, Ranwick,” he said, “in which direction lies your home?”

“Fulham way,” answered the young man.

“We will go a little way together then, if you have no objection.”

“Objection,” cried young Ranwick, frankly; “not in the least. Only too glad to find a companion on my homeward route.”

“Then we'll step out. You smoke?”

"No," said Matthew.

"Lucky fellow, that has escaped a bad habit," said Searle, as he passed his arm through that of his fellow-clerk, and marched off side by side with him down the square.

Damaris was arranging her music again by this time; its proper order still perplexed her, or she was not anxious to relinquish a search for something amongst her collection.

"Damaris," said her uncle at last.

"Mr. Harland," she answered at his call.

"You were not serious about singing any more to-night, girl?"

"Scarcely serious," she said, lightly.

"One can have too much of a good thing," he remarked, "and I never liked singing; never cared too much about it."

Damaris did not answer. She had fallen into thought again—might have been thinking of the time when she had had too much of this good gift too, and tramped about the streets in velvet and feathers, the Signorina Elvani. A stranger had risen from the dead—from the dead past,—and talked strangely, therefore it was possible that she was nearer to the past that night, despite all the efforts that she might

be making to escape it. Had she had the idea, that an hour's practice would drive it out of her head, we wonder !

"I saw Mr. Searle speaking to you," said her uncle so suddenly, that she started at the name, "what do you think of him?"

"Think of him. Oh! he is abrupt. I don't like him much."

"No; I suppose not. Searle is not liked very much out of business hours. Far from a lady's man, Damaris?"

"Yes—very far."

"What did he talk about? He came back on purpose to say something, I noticed."

"He asked me if—if I had forgotten Stackford—seen my father and mother—remembered the past, and my place in it."

She compressed her lips as she spoke; she turned very white whilst speaking. Mr. Harland, on the contrary, appeared to turn green in his easy chair, and his shoulders to rise more about his ears, as though, like a cat, he was setting his back up at the thoughts suggested to him.

"I'm da—I'm amazed, girl. I can't imagine that even he could have been guilty of such

insolence as that. It must have been done purposely to humiliate you—you, under my protection, and in the house to which he had been invited. What the devil is it to do with him! What did you say to him, Damaris?"

"I told him that it was not his business, and that he was rude in his inquiries."

"That's right, girl. He will not annoy you again, if you pluck up a spirit at the outset. I will take care, Damaris, that he never has a chance in this house."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Harland shortly afterwards rang for his valet, and was assisted out of the room towards his bedchamber. He was tired with party giving, and in need of rest. He said, "Good night, Damaris," without any show of affection, but then he was not a demonstrative man, and Damaris had not looked for caresses from her eccentric uncle, when she had taken her place as an ornament in his household. When the door had closed on Mr. Harland, she flung herself into the chair that he had vacated, and two white hands, glittering with jewelled rings, were pressed quickly, almost spasmodically before her face, as though to shut her in with

herself from the garish room in which she sat, and whence her uncle's guests had sallied. A deep thinker this Damaris Worcester, for the servants, imagining that the room was empty, came lumbering in ten minutes afterwards, stared at the silent figure in the chair, and then went out again, without arousing for an instant the attention of the dreamer.

It was an hour later by the gilt time-piece on the mantel-shelf when she suddenly leaped to her feet, and stood upon the hearth-rug, with her hands pressed to her temples, and her raven hair pushed back, a fair subject for a picture.

"How I have been thinking!" she said to herself; "thinking so hard, that I feel quite giddy. How I hate this Mr. Searle already. I wish that he had never come back from the Brazils—that the ship which brought him had sunk to the——no, no; *not* so bad as that, either!"

CHAPTER IV.

TWO HOMES.

MR. SEARLE parted with Matthew Ranwick at the top of Sloane Street, hailed a Hansom cab, and gave directions to be driven towards London Bridge railway as rapidly as possible.

At the railway terminus, after a slight dispute about the cab-fare,—Mr. Searle having trade notions concerning not paying too much for anything,—he found that the last train was saved by a few minutes, and therefore took a second-class ticket for Caterham.

A roundabout route it had been for London Bridge, but Mr. Searle had had his reasons for accompanying young Ranwick, and had not been disposed to study fatigue in the matter. He was a man who bore fatigue well, for he had been travelling that day some hundreds of miles, had dressed hurriedly at an

hotel, attended an evening party, walked to Sloane Street, had been driven in a cab to the foot of London Bridge, and now was winding up the day's proceedings by another forty minutes' ride in a Brighton and South Coast railway train as far as the pleasant hills of Caterham.

For an instant he seemed disposed to sleep in a corner of the hard compartment into which he had been put; but he or his mind was not at rest, for after a few minutes *pose*, he lowered the window of the carriage and looked out, drew it up again and surveyed his travelling companions, entered into conversation with an old gentleman opposite concerning railway negligence in general, and the selfishness of one railway passenger in particular, who had been compelled to leave off smoking at the request of an asthmatical lady in the opposite corner, and who had become personal in his remarks in consequence. Mr. Searle agreed that smoking was a selfish habit,—an acquired habit of which every sensible man should break himself,—and then, to the amazement of his fellow-men, began to get ready his own cigar as the train slackened in speed at Caterham Junction.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” he said politely,

closing the carriage door after him, and striding along the platform at a rapid pace, like a man who scented his home, or his supper in it.

“Good night, John Rigby,” he said to the railway porter who received his pass, — a grey-whiskered, grey-haired man, with a lantern tucked under his arm for a better light upon the tickets put into his hand. John Rigby stared hard at Mr. Searle, but could make nothing of him, and had not time to study the matter just then, and Mr. Searle, who had not seen John Rigby for seven years, went out into the country and marched along between the hills and hedge-rows at a sharper pace than ever.

A pretty Gothic villa, moderate in its dimensions and pretensions, stood in his way after ten minutes’ brisk walk ; this was evidently home, for he flung away his cigar, opened the swing gate, and went along the path humming a tune to himself, in a light-hearted fashion, very unlike a man who had not found in thirty-six years of life anything in the world worth living for.

A rattling at the brass knocker underneath the panel, and then the door open, and the

lady of the house herself to welcome him upon the threshold, with the servant in the rear, open-mouthed and light in hand.

“My dear Lewis!”

“My dear Rachel!”

“To think that I have you back again, my dear boy,” cried the lady, embracing him, “after all these years, just as if nothing had happened.”

“Nothing has happened, my dear girl, I hope,” he said, returning her embrace.

“Well, not much, certainly.”

“The summers have come and gone, the world has gone round the sun seven times, and we are not seven years younger, Rachel,—that’s all, I think.”

“That’s all!”

They passed into the room where Rachel had been sitting up for him,—a prettily furnished room, with a certain pretension to elegance of style in its surroundings,—and then whilst Lewis Searle stripped himself of his greatcoat, he took a survey of her who had greeted him so heartily.

A tall lady, spare and somewhat angular, ten or twelve years his senior, pale-faced, high

cheek-boned, with a nose so very straight that a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles had considerable difficulty in keeping a place thereon,—a lady in black silk, with black silk mittens on her hands to match her dress perhaps, and with black hair to match her brother's.

For brother and sister constituted the degree of relationship between them, and despite the swarthy countenance of the one and the pale face of the other, the likeness was very apparent. The man's was the face of one who had travelled a great deal; and the woman's, of one who had suffered a little,—the latter, also the refined, speaking face of the gentlewoman.

"You must be tired, Lewis," said his sister, as she passed the greatcoat to the servant, who shut the door upon them.

"Not particularly. It takes something more than riding in trains and paying visits to fatigue me, Rachel. My powers of endurance are immense still."

"I am very glad to hear it."

"Now tell me," he said, dropping into a chair before the fire, and at a little distance from the arm-chair in which Rachel Searle ensconced

herself, "now tell me whether I have altered very much in seven years?"

"I don't think that you have, Lewis," she answered, steadily surveying him, "but then I see with my heart,—with almost a mother's eyes."

"And the heart is always young," said Lewis, letting his hand drop lightly on his sister's for a moment. "Well, and you?"

"Have seven years more anxiety upon my face,—don't you see their marks?"

"What have you to be anxious about, Rachel?—independent, aloof from scandal, apart from society, the tenant of the very home we used to sketch in our minds' eye, my dear."

"The old anxiety about—you! Nothing else. I am happy in myself. 'Not comfortless,' as the poet says."

"Ah! not comfortless," repeated Searle, slowly, "and only anxious about one more contented—shall I say more happy—than you are."

"Then you have given up your old idea,—that wretched theory which has made you miserable. I am so pleased to hear it."

Searle laughed as he stooped forward to warm his hands at the fire.

"What a girl you are, to be sure!" he said.

"Oh! Lewis,—you are brooding on our past misfortunes still, on the troubles that we long ago surmounted."

"I never brood."

"You regard the world and your fellow-creatures with the same distrust. Oh!" with a low wail that she was not able to repress, "what a noble character it has spoiled! It would have been a perfect one without it."

"Wisely ordained then that I should not be perfection," he replied, laughing again; "there, don't let us talk about this. You are a religious woman, and see good in everything—I don't; but we are both happy."

"How is it possible for you to be happy?"

"Both content then," he corrected, "for I am home for good."

"Yes, for good, at last," she answered, her face brightening very much, "I thank God for it every night—I don't know how to be grateful enough, Lewis."

"You were always a warm-hearted woman, grateful for small benefits, and this is of the smallest. How have my flowers prospered in my absence?"

“ Well.”

“ And my greenhouse plants—my ferns—*mes enfans*? They have increased and multiplied, I hope.”

“ Yes—yes; but about yourself? In seven years have you not met with a single specimen of human kind of whom you have felt that you could make a friend—or a wife?”

“ Good God! a wife!” exclaimed Lewis Searle, in genuine horror; “ has your imagination stretched itself so far as that, then?”

“ You have not answered my question.”

“ My dear Rachel,” said Searle, “ a man who has lived thirty-six years without a wife, can do without that luxury for the remainder of his existence.”

“ A friend then—some one for whom you could feel a brotherly affection, and who would return it, and love you?”

Mr. Searle's brow darkened a little.

“ How many real friends does a man make after thirty-six?” he asked; “ his tastes are formed then, and his friends are round him then—or never. In my case, never!” He took up the poker and rapped the great Wallsend that had been set upon the fire for him hours ago,

slowly and persistently, till it split into pieces and brightened up the room with flame, whilst his sister repressed a housewifely desire to take the poker from his hands, and save her coals. He was fairly in for an explanation, and she would not disturb him.

“I did not go away in search of friends; I have not found them. During the last seven years I have not met with one man or woman who has even reached my standard of what a man or woman should be.”

“Ah! that’s very likely,” said his sister.

“I don’t believe that I have met with an honest, unselfish, truthful man or woman. I don’t think that I have even met with those capable of disguising their love of self and greed of gain; in this world, Rachel, it’s a rough scramble for the good things in it, and no quarter to the weak ones thrust aside in the *melée*.”

“In the weak ones you might find—”

“Weak principles, to match their want of physique, and much boasting of their greater virtues. I still maintain that it is a good system which keeps us at arm’s length of such folk. We were both terribly deceived when we

were young—deceived at all points. You found comfort and peace in religion—I became a little soured for awhile; but I emerged from my furnace of affliction a trifle harder for the process, perhaps—nothing more.”

“Quite hard enough, Lewis.”

“I think that I must have been very *soft* before,” he said, laughing, as at a good joke, whilst his sister looked at him with tears behind her glasses. “I played Pythias to Damon, my partner in the Brazils, till Damon forged my name and ran off with my money. You and I turned to our guardian for further support;—the trustee who had been my father’s friend, and whom my father had not found out as wholly untrustworthy—and he had to confess on his villanous knees that he had spent our birthright, and deserved not the mercy which he craved of us, and that we conceded to him. In our poverty we found, as that old man of Athens did, the world despising us; you lost your lover—I think I can talk of him now without wounding you, Rachel—and I lost the moral support of every man who had called himself my friend. Lucky for us that we were strong-minded beings, who did not easily give

up. We lost our money, and we lost our faith in everything but ourselves."

"That kept us strong till Mr. Harland came to the Brazils, and you became his clerk."

"Yes; and Harland put the finishing touch to my opinion of what humanity consisted. Poor wretch!" he said contemptuously, "I suppose he was born so!"

"Still—"

"An odd catalogue of misfortunes made of me an odd man, you think?" he interrupted. "You may judge me better than I do myself; but I give myself credit for much prudence; I know no excitement, I mind my own business; and I foil all the duplicity I can out of aggravation's sake—I assist a few in life when it is possible, or when I think justice or mercy require it; but I will have no one to assist *me*, and I will go on my own way to the end."

"Lewis, you boast too much. You cannot regulate your own future in this manner, without a thought to the Higher Power that rules you."

"Owning the Higher Power," he said almost reverently; "shall I say, God willing?"

"God willing that you should think always

so badly of your fellow-creatures!" she added, with a sigh.

"One left to hope in," he said, with his hand upon her shoulder; "not one I call a friend, but something nearer and dearer than any friend can be to me."

"God bless you, Lewis, for that faith in me denied to all the rest! Now tell me of your travels and adventures."

"Ah! that's a fairer subject to grow eloquent upon."

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On a second home it behoves us to take a glimpse that night for the reader's better understanding of the position of our characters. We have followed Mr. Searle to his home, learning more of him and his motives from the journey; let us look in upon the young man with whom he parted at the top of Sloane Street.

Matthew Ranwick's home was situated in the Fulham Road, not an unpleasant ride on the top of an omnibus to business in the City, if the weather was fine and one was not too particular. A small house in the Fulham Road, where a watcher sat up for him as anxiously as Rachel

Searle had sat up for her brother, and where the greeting was almost as cordial.

“Come in, boy, and rest yourself after all this gallivanting—lots of business and lots of pleasure, and no sleep atweenwhiles. I wonder how you can stand so much on it!”

The speaker was a man whom the reader has met at Westbourne-upon-Sea—a day-dreamer who has lived to witness much of his dreaming realized, which is not the luck of enthusiasts in general. Old Matthew Ranwick was in town to take care of his grandson, and the Bath-chair business had long since been sold off to much advantage, less to please the hale old man than the proud young fellow for whose interests he had striven. Seven years to old Ranwick had not made a great deal of difference—he was of the tough material that wears well to the last. Stooping a little more, his hair more white if that be possible, his features more prominent and Punch-like, this was the same being who had done much business at Westbourne in dragging along incapables.

“Now sit down, boy, and tell us all about it,” said the grandfather, when they were in the first floor of their apartments; “you have stopped

up long enough to oblige yourself—now think of the old man.”

“To be sure I will,” said Matthew, heartily; “do I ever cut you short when there’s news worth the hearing to relate?”

“I can’t say as how you do. Altogether, Mat,” said the old man, “you’ve been the best of grandsons—you’ve stuck to me, and haven’t grown too proud of the grandfather, or too anxious like to stow him out of the way as you got rich.”

“When I was a poor lad you stuck to me—and I shan’t give you up. Rich! Oh! we will not talk of riches yet awhile, dad,” said Matthew, hastily; “we may be climbing upwards to the top, but we haven’t reached there yet.”

“No—but we shall.”

“I don’t like to build too much upon it,” Matthew answered, thoughtfully.

“Let me build for you, then,” said his grandfather, “and give me all the blame when I build wrong, and all the praise when right.”

“Why—that’s not fair.”

“I knowed that it would come true—in my heart I knowed it, boy, seven years ago—

unpossible as it all looked, especially when the Elvanis turned up in that aggerwating manner. *He* took a fancy to you for his boy's sake, just as I should have fancied any boy who had been fond of you, if that boy had been left and you—tooked."

He shuddered at the last suggestion, but went on with his reminiscence.

"It was only the first move, and then all straight, Mat," said the old man; "the good eddication made you fit for a clerk—my stars, how you did learn, too!—and he couldn't do less than find you a berth, with so many berths to spare about him. Then your nat'ral talents began to shine, for you didn't jib at anythink, as other people did—and all was plain-sailing arterwards. Why, I can sit still here and see you skim along—with your genus never at fault, and see the end of it all as clear as clear. Don't you see the end yourself?"

"I really think that I do," said Matthew Ranwick, with his handsome face aglow at the prospect; "if you press me hard with questions, I'll say,—yes!"

Bravo—bravo—it's like a play!"

"I have been almost too lucky to begin with.

The man who wins first, loses afterwards, they say."

"At silly cards—not in life, Mat. The one with the first start goes on ahead."

"I'll believe it now, for Mr. Harland takes me into his confidence, and I have done my best to deserve that. Done too much, at times, I think," he added, shaking his head as though in protest against his previous conduct, "schemed myself into the good graces of the rich man; occasionally done violence to my feelings, for in all moods and on all occasions, Mr. Harland is *not* to be admired."

"But you must study the master, Mat," suggested the old man; "fine feelings, independence, bounce, must not stand in the way of that."

"No, no," said Mat, almost sadly; "that's the worst of it. I don't like to say what I don't mean—to pretend an interest when I have it not—to show that energy in his service, which is not always there. But I am growing a fine humbug by degrees, dad!"

"Nonsense."

"I am not, old man," he said, becoming more grave for an instant, "quite so good as I

used to be. I feel always on the look-out for spies, usurpers, men who will thwart me or see through me. I should have liked these chances to have come in a different fashion—as rewards of merit, not as temptations.”

“Why, Mat—why Mat,” said the less susceptible Ranwick; “this is putting it fine, my lad. You’ve done nothing wrong, I know.”

“I’m only a schemer, seeking to cut young Courtenay out—descending at times to some of Courtenay’s little subterfuges. I’m getting on in the world, uncle, but I’m ashamed of myself, for all that. I’m not the kind of fellow,” he added, quaintly, “that I should like to have been!”

“Why, what are you, Mat?”

“I’m none the better for being in Mr. Harland’s service,” he said, bluntly; “and I’m getting worse by degrees. I’m almost as suspicious as my master. I covet his goods, or a share of them—I long for riches as a thirsty man longs for water. I have to say what I don’t mean twenty times a-day, and my rise in life has turned my head, and made me as proud as the devil.”

“I don’t know who has a greater right to

be proud than you have," said Mr. Ranwick, senior, consolingly; "you have got a good place, a handsome salary, a handsome prospect, and if there's a handsomer fellow in hisself between this and Westbourne I'll—"

"Hold hard, there!" cried Matthew, bursting into a laugh again; "I'm vain enough of my bumpkin's face, without your flattery. Dad, I think you must have helped to spoil me first with all your praises, and then I followed suit myself. Suppose we drop it; it's not exactly the thing for you to talk about or me to listen to."

"Tell me about to-night, Mat," said the old man; "it was a grand party o' course?"

"Yes; it was a grand affair, as usual, and rather slower than usual," answered Mat; "it did not suit me, but I looked as if it did. I'm always looking as if it did, you know," he added, with a shrug of his shoulders; "and as it's too late to look any different now, wh y—on we go to greatness."

"What did—what did the guv'nor say, now, to begin with?"

"He dropped good solid hints of increasing my salary from four hundred to five hundred

pounds a-year at once. I think, young as I am," he said, conceitedly, "that I deserve as much. I do plenty of work for the money, and that's more than Courtenay can say."

"Courtenay is a stuck-up young monkey, and I don't like him at all."

"He was a nuisance once, but we understand each other better now, and are more than civil, in office hours or out of them. He will be Mr. Harland's partner."

"The deuce he will!" gasped forth the grandfather.

"And I shall be, a year hence, a partner also. There!" clapping his hand on the knee of his listener, "it's promised at last, and Harland is a man who keeps his word. There's your prophecy, from beginning to end, complete, grand-dad, and the Ranwick family will rise to all the old magnificence."

"Your mother's grandfather kept his carriage," said Mr. Ranwick.

"So did my grandfather, but he drew it behind him," cried Matthew, now in the best of spirits, for he had shaken off his first impressions; "and, in due course, so will I keep mine, after the great-grandfather's style. I have high

notions in my head, and I want a high position in life to match them. The drudgery of the desk won't suit me. I have tasted blood, or blood-money, or something, and am"—here his brow lowered again—"terribly ambitious."

"All the better."

"A partner in the house of Harland!" he said, musingly; "mind you, it's very much like a dream. I am the lucky object of an eccentric man's fancy. It was the toss-up of a sixpence whether I should not be a sailor, like my father; sometimes I wish that I had been."

"Miss Harland, — she was at the party, nat'rally?"

"Oh, yes; looking as bright and beautiful as ever. I always feel a blackguard when I am in her sight; for it seems as if I had stepped between her family and her uncle to rob them of their rights,—as if I were even trying to oust her from Mr. Harland's love and favour. I hope she does not think that."

"That might be easily arranged atween you two," said the old man, "she's young and handsum, and with lots o' chaps about

her. Arn't you losing a bit of chance in that quarter, through being so plaguey slow?"

Matthew Ranwick reddened very much at this. He had fine feelings in his way: a careful teaching in the last years of his schooltime had given them him, business and scheming for advancement in that business had not robbed him of them yet, and those feelings were seriously disturbed by his grandfather's practical suggestions. This was not the first hint of the kind that had been conveyed to him lately, if not quite so plainly.

"That will do," he said, slowly.

The old man hesitated at this command; but it was for a moment only.

"To see you and that girl make a match of it is just the end of the story that we all want and wait for."

"I can't scheme for Damaris," he said, sharply; "her love must come of her own free will to me."

"You like the gal. I know it, Mat."

"I like her! yes: but I feel a long way from her always," he said, dreamily; "she treats me as her father's friend, but let me

step by a hair's breadth over that mark, and she is ice itself. A proud, incomprehensible enigma is Damaris. We will not speak of her again."

"She ain't a great deal to be proud on, either. You'r too shame-faced in that quarter, boy. I'm sure that you have ony—"

"We will not speak of her again. She may love me one day, or she may hate me altogether; one is as likely as the other. But,"—holding his grandfather by the arm—"she is a subject on which we will *not* speak, under any circumstances."

"Wery well," said the old man, submissively.

Matthew Ranwick relapsed into a brown study after this, and his grandfather made no effort to dislodge him therefrom. Let the boy have his own way! He always let the boy have it, for that matter; and the boy had become a man, and grown up self-willed and strong-willed.

Old Ranwick looked furtively at his grandson from under his shaggy eyebrows, once or twice, but a something told him that he had asked enough questions that night, and

that more would be resisted. He was content to watch him, and to think with doting fondness of his boy's good looks, his great abilities, his luck!

It did not strike him that, with all three, the young man was terribly discontented, or the good looks belied him, sitting there.

CHAPTER V.

INQUISITIVE PHILOSOPHY.

LEWIS SEARLE appeared at business the following day, — settled down to business at once. Those old in office like himself, — grey-haired men who were clerks in the great house before Lewis Searle's time — rubbed their glasses, and looked at the new comer, wondering if seven years had really passed since they had seen him last. He came into the office with a brisk "good morning" to every one whom he encountered, calling every one whom he had known in old days by his right name, too, and then passed into the inner room, adjacent to Mr. Harland's sanctum, opened the desk, and began to write. It had been a room occupied lately by Mr. Ranwick and Mr. Edwin Courtenay, two young fellows who had gone over the heads of the

general body, and risen from the ranks with precipitancy; and those two young fellows aforesaid were in doubt what to do after the interloper had taken his seat.

Mr. Harland arriving at a quarter-past ten A.M., settled that question at once. He was a man of few words, and he realized the position very quickly.

"Must have Searle close at hand; and you, Matthew, had better be near Mr. Searle."

"You don't intend that I should go back to the outer office, along with the clerks?" exclaimed Mr. Courtenay, with an expression of disgust on his countenance.

"For a day or two, until we can arrange matters," said Mr. Harland. "What does it matter where a man is, if he does his work properly?"

"No; but it looks like a drop in the office," muttered Courtenay, who was not inclined to give way very gracefully.

"But it isn't a drop."

"I don't see—"

"The necessity for arguing—no more do I," concluded Mr. Harland, as he passed into his

private room, and began hammering away at his spring bell with an impatient hand.

The office messenger made his appearance, and Mr. Harland bade him inform Mr. Searle that Mr. Harland was ready to see him. After that business began in earnest, in those great dusky offices in Mincing Lane; that business with which we have little to do as story tellers, and the details of which would not interest our readers much.

Those friendly readers of ours will believe that Mr. Searle was a good man of business—a first-rate hand, hard to match, impossible to excel amongst a world of business people. A genius for commerce in fact, hence his power over Mr. Harland and his value to that gentleman in matters of delicate negotiation; a man who was of too great value at home, to be spared any longer from the head house. Mr. Harland had struggled against his loss and tried to put up with it for seven years; had taken much work upon his own frail shoulders and acute brain in his anxiety to prove that he was his old self again, and as good as other people. But he felt Searle's coming back as a relief to him, and that there would ensue once more

days and weeks when he could be spared from work. And there were times when, with all his business aptitude, his love of business, his concentrative powers of turning money, he yearned for a greater peace of mind, and was certain that more rest would do him good. He scarcely owned it to himself, perhaps; he would not have confessed to Lewis Searle for the world, that he could not do without him, supported as he had been of late years by his nephew, who was shrewd in his way, and by Matthew Ranwick, who was as shrewd perhaps, and who did more work and pleased more the people who came to buy and sell at Harland's.

For Edward Courtenay did not please everyone in business, any more than he did away from it. Take him for all in all, he was not an amiable young man. We say this at once, as there may not be time for his character to develop itself in these pages, and as he takes his place here more for the sake of the influence he exerted over the actions of some of our characters, than for any merits or demerits of his own that call for especial remark. He is a minor character—one of the supernumeraries with whom we cannot dispense, hovering at

the side-scenes of our drama, and with no arduous part to sustain from the first scene to the last.

Not an amiable young man then—proud of his ancestors who had not been business people, and rather too proud for the wholesale business into which his mother had persuaded him to enter. A young cub of expensive tastes, which outran the annual salary allowed him by his mother, and necessitated a berth somewhere; a youth far from a fool or blind to his own interest, anxious to secure independence in the easiest way that might present itself, and envious of luckier folk than he who had already obtained it. Watchful of his chances, cautious in his steps, extravagant in his tastes, and not too rigid a moralist after sundown, it was rumoured. This is all we need say at present concerning Edwin Courtenay, save that he did not take kindly to Mr. Searle's re-appearance, and showed that he did not, which at all events was not good policy in a youth looking out for the main chance. He had not taken kindly to young Ranwick in the first instance the reader is aware, and had fought hard for superiority over him, but without success. Matthew

Ranwick knew his own power, his mental superiority, and went ahead in the office quietly but steadily. He had not been afraid of Edwin Courtenay, or of Edwin Courtenay's interest, and it came to pass that young Courtenay began to see that Matthew was a favourite of his uncle's, and a clerk of more than a common degree of perspicacity, and to drop his dislike, even perhaps to entertain, after a fashion, a liking for Ranwick, which occasionally extended to invitations to dinner at the Star and Garter, and to evening strolls, which had been more frequent a year ago than at the time we look in upon them all at Mincing Lane. Courtenay did not like Mr. Searle, or take any pains, or make any sacrifice to like him; he should be a partner in twelve months, and above this general manager; and the general manager, who was aware of the fact, did not pay him any more respect for it, or trouble himself at all about him. Mr. Harland had told Edwin as well as Matthew Ranwick to study Mr. Searle and that gentleman's business ways, as though Mr. Searle was a paragon. If he had had so much respect for Mr. Searle, why had he not made him a partner long ago?

Surely the man who had helped Mr. Harland to his fortune was worth a share in the machinery by which that fortune was made? Edwin saw after a few weeks that the man was less respected than the method, and took his cue accordingly. There was nothing to be gained by endeavouring to ingratiate himself in Mr. Searle's favour; it would neither please his uncle, himself, nor even Mr. Searle, so the new comer became as indifferent to him as he was indifferent—or thought himself indifferent—to the new comer.

He did not even think a great deal of Mr. Searle's business abilities, having a vast opinion of his own, which was a set-off possibly against the mild opinion entertained of them by other people. He asserted his dignity by having a third desk introduced into the inner office after a time, and then the business flowed on smoothly and swiftly, like a business in good hands and well looked after.

Matthew Ranwick studied Lewis Searle more intently. He was a young man who studied most things, and who was quick to profit by a hint from others, an example, or a well-meant piece of advice. He was clever, but not too clever;

he believed that it was possible for men to exist who knew more than he did, and by those men he would profit if possible. A long-headed young man, this Matthew Ranwick—a pushing man under whose feet no grass grew; Mr. Searle saw as Mr. Harland had already seen, that here was an acquisition to the staff, and one who was worth high wages to retain. He was somewhat interested in Matthew, although that young gentleman was not aware of the fact. He thought Matthew a character worth studying for a time; and he admired the courage and ability which had taken him already a fair way on the road to success. It struck him that Matthew was a trifle too sanguine about everything in business, one who made too sure of everything, and that was the fault which might wreck his ability, Searle thought. In good time, and when there was a fitting opportunity, he might hint as much to him,—for although he had no sympathy with his species, he liked to see those who most deserved success in life attain it. There were fair traits of character in young Ranwick, he thought,—a straightforwardness, an earnestness, a quickness, that were note-

worthy ; but he fancied that he saw the ruling faults in him already, and they were faults which he expected, and were natural to the gross humanity of which, in his own conceit, he thought himself so immeasurably above.

An inquisitive man as well as a conceited one, despite his unsympathetic nature. His curiosity puzzled himself too—even aggravated him. He wondered why Mr. Harland's nieces should trouble his mind—why he should think of the stately, repellent, highly objectionable beauty whom he had encountered at her uncle's house—whom he had helped to place there ; and why he should think still more of the younger sister who was “in disgrace,” whom Mr. Harland disliked and kept in the shadow. He could not help wondering what had become of her, why she had not been liked by Mr. Harland, and into what kind of woman she had developed. Coming back to England had revived his interest in an old story wherein he had played the part of ruling agent, poor Harland having been on the flat of his back at that period. It was very odd—it was terribly vexatious—that he should be troubled by these people again, and be irritated by a paltry curiosity to know

what had happened to the Worcesters since he had been away. He set it down at last to his objection to mystery—and he fancied that there was a mystery somewhere, everybody being so quiet concerning these people. Mr. Harland did not condescend to explain—did not thank his manager for speaking of Damaris on one occasion, but changed the subject to the one everlasting topic of the Brazils. Mr. Searle decided at last, however, that it was no business of his ; there had been a difficulty in arriving at that decision, but his mind was made up to the idea, he would probably have outlived it, had it not been for young Ranwick, who started afresh the old subject as they went out of the office together one evening, and walked the length of Mincing Lane before they separated.

“ Well, it has been a hard day’s work, Mr. Searle, and I am glad that we are well through it,” he said, as they turned into the street.

It had been a hard day’s work, the Brazilian mail having come in, and entailing an immense amount of correspondence as usual.

“ You are not afraid of work, Mr. Ranwick ? ”

“ Not I,” he answered, half laughing ; “ on

the contrary, rather fond of it, because it suits me, and my constitution. But the party last night was a late one."

"Party—where?"

"At Mr. Harland's. Oh! you knew nothing of it," he said, colouring. "I beg pardon. I believe it is not etiquette to talk of the parties to which you have been invited, or which you have attended, to third persons who may be acquainted with the host, and yet not have been asked."

"Awkward occasionally. There are people in the world who would think themselves slighted. I was not asked, but I'm not offended."

"You are not fond of parties, possibly?"

"They are interesting; one meets character there. An evening party to an observer is almost as interesting as a book."

"I don't know that I observe at all, but I find it very interesting."

"And meet with interesting people, I dare say. What time did you break up?"

"Not till four this morning."

"Mr. Harland keeps late hours. This could not have been a dinner party?"

“Oh, no!—a dancing party.”

“Was it, by George!”

Mr. Searle was evidently surprised; he even repressed a smile at his crippled master's odd fancy, though the effort at repression was seen by his companion, and replied to at once.

“Not a party to Mr. Harland's tastes, of course,” he said, “but got up to please Miss Damaris, who is fond of dancing and society. They are rather gay at Eaton Square.”

“So it appears. And Miss Damaris looked her best?”

“I never saw her look more beautiful, Mr. Searle.”

“She is an ornament to Mr. Harland's house; and one can scarcely believe in the old days to think of her and her present position. She has lived it down, or stamped it down, well. I wonder whether the effort caused her much pain.”

“You know the story, of course?”

“Of course.”

“In the secret, as it were,” said Matthew; then he added, very suddenly, “for it is a secret, you understand.”

“Mr. Harland has already cautioned me: Mr. Harland has a very proper pride.”

"I don't know whether it is proper, or not," answered young Ranwick; "but the past is objectionable at times. I think of my own position years ago, and blush at it."

"Why?"

"I have left it so far behind, that it looks like a disgrace," he said frankly; "not that I am ashamed of it exactly, for I worked my way honestly upwards; and not that I am ashamed of the old man who first made me ambitious."

"Ah! a deep old fellow in his way. What has become of him?"

"He lives with me, sir. I take care of him, just as he once took care of me."

"A good return," answered Mr. Searle. "And what has become of the Worcesters—the father and mother, with whom Damaris lives not?"

"That's her uncle's fault."

"Very likely. Where are the Worcesters?"

"I don't know. I don't think anyone knows."

"The younger sister—Eunice?"

"Oh, she is mistress at a national school a little way in the country—somewhere near Caterham, I believe. Mr. Harland gave her a

good education, sent her to a training college, and the training college sent her to school again, only this time as a principal."

"Who told you this?"

"That's no secret. Eunice Worcester used to visit Eaton Square, until she offended her uncle."

"A man rather prone to take offence."

"She would not change her name to Harland, or something. At one time I have heard Miss Damaris say that she feared Eunice would become the favourite."

"Ah! she feared that, poor girl! Well, fears are over; Eunice Worcester is under banishment, and Damaris Harland is a lucky woman. Good evening."

"Good evening."

The two men shook hands and departed. A quarter of an hour afterwards Mr. Searle was on his way to Caterham. At Caterham he must have made a few inquiries as to the national schools within a radius of five miles, for the following evening he was five miles from Caterham, approaching a red brick edifice of a disjointed kind of Gothic exterior, with a stone eruption of a belfry in the roof.

As he made his way along a gravel path, a little to the right of the schoolroom, and towards that part of the house which the schoolmistress evidently inhabited after school hours, a hand drew the blind away from the window, and a woman's face peered into the twilight that had already brought its shadows to the landscape. The face, that had looked out very anxiously, quickly disappeared again at the sight of Mr. Searle, and he approached the door of the house without any further diversion to his progress.

A small servant-maid, bright and brisk, and one who had evidently been reared at the school in former days, she looked so like part of the establishment, responded to Mr. Searle's summons at the door.

Yes, Miss Worcester was at home. Would the gentleman send in his card, or state the nature of his business? The nature of his business being difficult to describe, Mr. Searle sent in his card, and stepped into the hall. A few minutes afterwards he was ushered into a neatly furnished sitting-room, and was making his best bow to a neatly dressed young lady, *petite* in figure and features,

as dark-eyed and dark-haired as himself, one who had not changed so much as her sister since he saw her seven years ago and advised her as to her future course in life—rather a plain girl, in fact. Eunice Worcester was still Eunice Worcester; he fancied looking at her then, that he should have recognized her anywhere. Dark-featured like himself also, with that quickness of glance and crispness of accent that had struck him as characteristic of the child.

“This is an unexpected visit, indeed,” she said, returning Mr. Searle’s bow; “I hope that nothing has happened at—Eaton Square?”

“I should be the last man to bring you the news had anything occurred in that quarter,” replied Mr. Searle. “I was curious to see you, and what seven years had made of you—and here I am.”

Miss Worcester, looking very steadily and unflinchingly at her visitor, said, “Indeed!” motioned him to a vacant chair, and took one herself.

“Well,” she said, with a little twitch at the corners of her mouth, “and what do you think of me?”

"I think," said Mr. Searle, after a pause, "that you have grown a little."

"You have come a long way to express so poor an opinion, Mr. Searle," she said, trying hard to repress a smile.

"I am merely inquisitive," replied Searle. "I met your sister Damaris a few weeks back at her uncle's house, and saw a great change in her. I, who am a student of human nature, you must know, thought that I should like to see if you had outgrown the past as effectually."

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully, "you are inquisitive."

She appeared puzzled by Mr. Searle's propinquity—on her guard, almost, against committing herself, even to a certain extent, as he continued to linger there, embarrassed by his presence.

"You do not accept curiosity, Miss Worcester, as my real motive for intruding here?" Mr. Searle said, after a long pause.

"You would tell me the truth, I think?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Ah!" with almost a blush rising to her face, "you do not remember."

Mr. Searle was at a loss to account for this

for an instant; then his retentive memory brought back his past conversation with her—his past exordium to her to tell the truth; his reproof at what he had considered a child's duplicity.

"He who could preach against deception—white lies in fact"—thought Eunice, "was evidently a truthful man."

Another long pause, then Eunice broke the silence by saying—

"You have seen my sister Damaris, Mr. Searle. What do you think of her?"

"*She* has grown a great deal—grown out of all knowledge, as the saying is—all knowledge even of the past."

"Altered very much for the better—quite the lady, sir?"

"Quite the lady, and altered very much."

She noticed the difference in his quotation, and was quick to add thereto, watching him very closely now—

"And for the better, sir?"

"Probably," he said at last; "you must remember that I have seen less of your sister than of yourself; any alteration must have been for the better in many respects."

"Yes; that is true."

"But has she grown up, Miss Worcester, the woman whom you exactly fancied?"

"I love Damaris with my whole heart, sir," she cried, impetuously; "there is much nobleness in her; she takes time to understand—more time than I can even afford to a sister,—but she is very, very dear to me."

"And very incomprehensible?"

"No; I don't say that," was the quick answer. "I think I make her out in most things. She has her faults, which are natural enough—we all have faults! She may be a little proud, and that has set you against her."

"Against her!" echoed Mr. Searle. "Whatever has made you fancy that I am set against her?"

Eunice paused before she committed herself to a reply.

"You spoke with a reserve."

"And you speak with—an evasion."

"No—don't say that," said Eunice, perplexed. "I dislike evasion. I believe that I have disliked it in any and every shape since the day you lectured me for a falsehood that I told you. I seem never to have forgotten that

day; you read me a lesson which has outlasted many that were set me at school. I have believed, in my heart, that you were a good man; I believe it still, though you dislike Damaris."

"Miss Worcester, some one has told you that I dislike her."

"No."

"Then some one has told you that she dislikes me—your sister herself, perhaps?"

"Well—my sister herself—yes," was the fearless answer; "but I don't believe her assertion," continued Eunice very earnestly, "for Damaris is only impetuous, suspicious, quick to judge people, and as quick to reverse her judgment. You came back from Brazil two or three weeks ago, and said something to offend her; but then she is an impressionable girl, and her uncle has spoiled her a little by letting her have her own way too much."

"Strange that I should have been the subject of a conversation between your sister and yourself," said Mr. Searle, musingly. "I don't see matters very clearly here, or why I should be liked or disliked in the case. Why you should excuse her to me with this earnestness."

"Am I earnest?" asked Eunice; "well, probably. I excuse her lest you should have formed a bad impression at first sight of her in her womanhood. Seen her perhaps at her worst, which is in company, when she has put on company manners that do not suit her. But you must not judge Damaris too hastily—it is not fair to her."

"My judgment is of very little consequence," said Mr. Searle; "why are you anxious that I should think well of your sister?"

Eunice hesitated.

"Because I am in Mr. Harland's confidence?" he asked.

"Your influence raised us from poverty, Mr. Searle," said Eunice; "it might, exerted against her, do Damaris considerable harm."

"I have business influence with Mr. Harland—that is all."

"No—it is not all. It was not business influence that changed all our lives."

"I was simply Mr. Harland's agent."

"I don't think that, now," answered Eunice; "the past has perplexed me very much; the Mr. Harland of the old days is not the Mr. Harland who distrusts me and loves Damaris."

I have thought a great deal of this, and I have fancied that when you saw my uncle more often he was at his best."

"He was at his best probably when he was an invalid, but he was far from a model character then. He has been always a just man in his way, and that is all that I can say for Reuben Harland. You are very kind to attribute his better impulses to my influence, but you are very much mistaken."

"You were interested in our forlorn condition."

"I was very glad to shake you from my mind, I assure you," said Mr. Searle; "the position was an odd one, and I was interested for awhile as in a new story-book."

"And you skip the intermediate chapters, and come here to see how the story has ended."

"Exactly."

"It has ended in a way for which I am grateful," said Eunice, with a heightened colour—"grateful to you and to my uncle. At all events, we were saved from the life of street wanderers, and given an education that will always be of service to us. I think that my place is secure here, and if the worst comes to

the worst, why, here is a home for Damaris till she is weary of me or finds a better one."

"What do you call the worst coming to the worst, Miss Worcester?"

"My uncle tiring of Damaris."

"As he tired of you?"

"Yes. He tired of me when I would not obey his every wish, which, for all his kindness, he had no right to expect."

"Damaris is more obedient."

"Y—es," said Eunice, hesitatingly, "it appears so."

"And yet a prouder woman, I imagine," added Mr. Searle, thoughtfully. "Upon my word, your sister is somewhat of a paradox. I wonder if the solution to the riddle lies in the fact that she is less unselfish than her sister?"

"You must not say a word against her," exclaimed Eunice, warmly; "you have owned that you do not know her, and it is not fair to judge her. Give my sister time."

"I am not your sister's enemy, Miss Worcester," repeated Mr. Searle, feeling a strange vexation at this idea having impressed itself upon the two women with whom he was acquainted, "I am no man's enemy."

It annoyed him as much then to be considered an enemy as a friend to humanity. This was an odd consistency or inconsistency in Lewis Searle.

"I am very glad to hear that," cried Eunice. "I will tell Damaris, and set her mind at ease."

"Pray tell her nothing of the kind," said Mr. Searle, rising to depart; "she will find out—if she has not found out already—that our paths lie very wide apart, and are not likely to cross each other again. I have satisfied my curiosity, and seen what good fortune or a good education has made of two women. There's an end to it all! It must be something very uncommon to awaken my interest again. I am a business man, with a soul in ledgers and cash books. Good evening."

"Good evening, sir. For your present fleeting interest in me, at least, let me thank you, if I am not allowed to thank you for your past *agency*."

She laid stress on the last words of her speech,—an ironical stress that was less severe than pleasant. He was standing at the door, hat in hand, when his curiosity got the better of his cold philosophy.

"May I ask what has become of your father and mother, before I go, Miss Worcester?"

Eunice again exhibited that strange hesitation which had already perplexed Lewis Searle.

"Two missing figures from the story you have been reading," she said, archly; "well, my father and mother are—"

"Hush! Eunice," cried a voice at the room door, which was suddenly opened and thrust back; "don't tell him anything,—you have no right to say a word about them or me!"

Damaris Worcester had passed the window unobserved, startled the servant-maid who was star-gazing at the open door, stepped into the hall and then into the room to catch the last words of Eunice, and to break them off abruptly by her passionate interdict.

It was a surprise to both Mr. Searle and Eunice, and they stood gazing for a moment at this unexpected intruder on their dialogue.

"My dear Damaris," cried Eunice, running to her and kissing her, "I had given you up,—it was getting so late, dear."

"I promised you that I would come. I have just come in time, I think!" she added. Then turning to Mr. Searle, she asked almost peremp-

torily,—“Why is Mr. Searle anxious to learn the address of my parents? What possible connection can there be between them and him?”

“Not any,” answered Mr. Searle, “I miss them from their daughters’ sides,—the daughters never speak of them, and I fancied that there was a mystery somewhere. Pardon me; it is of no consequence.”

Damaris became less impassioned. She suddenly appeared to subside into her usual self,—or into a new self that Mr. Searle had not seen hitherto. Her face looked pale in the lamp-light,—very pale, but very beautiful.

“Oh! there is no mystery about them, Mr. Searle,” she said, in a low, almost a conciliatory tone of voice; “they are doing well, living in the country somewhere,—Eunice knows better than I. She corresponds with them, and they think justly enough that it is better not to trouble either of us.”

“Damaris!” ejaculated Eunice.

“Mr. Harland thinks so,” said Damaris, not heeding her sister’s exclamation, “and I have but to follow Mr. Harland’s wishes. You do not blame me, Mr. Searle, for the choice that I have made?”

"Miss Harland, I have no right to blame you."

"I have disobeyed orders,—orders tacitly implied rather than delivered to me,—by coming to see Eunice," said Damaris, with a forced smile, "but she is my sister still, and I cannot always keep away. Mr. Harland will of course know of this visit upon my return."

She looked hard at the tall man standing by the door, who inclined his head gravely, and repeated almost mechanically,—

"Of course."

"I have no secrets from Mr. Harland. He has been my benefactor; I am indebted to him,—and perhaps indirectly to you,—for my position in society, and it would be unfair, unwomanly, to disobey his wishes. He will forgive me coming here, for he is not an intractable man; and Eunice is my sister who has made her way in the world, and holds a respectable, a very respectable position."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Searle, as Damaris paused for an answer; "sisters should not be strangers to each other whatever the difference in position between them. Good evening."

“Good evening,” said Damaris, extending her hand; “if I uttered a few hasty words upon my entrance, you must attribute them to my uncle’s cause,—for my uncle objects to inquiries concerning my relations. Eunice, however, is independent of Mr. Harland, is under no bond and seal, and can thank you for your kindness in remembering them.”

“No thanks are necessary,” said Mr. Searle. He repeated his good evenings, shook hands with the ladies, and went away in deep thought. He walked all the way to Caterham, and stood with his hand on his own garden gate to reflect for the last time before facing Rachel with his every day face.

“At present, I don’t make her out exactly,” he said to himself, as he opened the gate and went up the gravel path.

CHAPTER VI.

DAMARIS'S CHARACTER DEVELOPS ITSELF.

As the door closed on Lewis Searle, so the mask dropped from Damaris Worcester. The set smile vanished, the brow contracted, there was lightning in the great dark eyes.

“What has that man been saying? What has he dared to ask you in his master’s name, Eunice?”

“In his master’s name—nothing.”

“He is his master’s spy,—he is as surely paid to keep a watch upon us, as upon his master’s business. • Eunice, you have been a tool in his hands, and have betrayed me!”

“No, Damaris,” answered her sister; “I have not betrayed you.”

“A word is a clue to a man like him.”

“I do not think—I cannot believe—that he would do you harm, were it even in his

power. Why, what harm have you ever done him?"

"That matters not. We do not measure the enmity against us by the antipathy we feel in our hearts towards the enemy. How did he find you out?"

"I know not."

"How did he know that I was coming here to-night?"

"That was a coincidence, I think."

"Ah! you are a simpleton and think unwisely."

"And you are strong-minded, and distrustful of all good in the world."

"Except the good that is here, my girl," she cried.

She flung her arms round the younger sister, clasped her to her bosom, and covered her face with kisses. There were tears in the eyes of Damaris to replace the lightning that had glittered there. This was not the haughty beauty whom we have seen in state at Mr. Harland's banquet; not the lady, forced and artificial, who had perplexed Lewis Searle just now; not the passionate and suspicious woman of a few moments since; but a something new, soft, and womanly.

"Oh! Damaris, if you were less distrustful of all good in the world," murmured Eunice.

"Only of all good in *my* world, sister," answered Damaris, with a heavy sigh; "the lower or the higher, one might be content with, and see many virtues in. People who have no riches, no expectations, and people who are rich by heritage, and must always be rich, *should be* very happy."

"The former class is within your reach, at least."

"Would you have me seek it?" asked Damaris, with a flash of her old impetuosity.

"If you are sure of happiness, there—why not?"

"I am not sure," Damaris answered. "I am the woman that has seen the world, and had expectations held out to her. Besides, I cannot let—"

"There, there, Damaris, not the old worldly talk to-night; the selfishness which warps your true nature and is doing you—oh! I am sure of it—much mischief."

"I am strong, and may be trusted," answered Damaris.

"Self-confidence that will deceive you."

“Am I not doing my uncle a service also; am I not an invaluable friend to him?” cried Damaris; “though I trust him not—though I feel that his love for me is of a shallowness, that may turn to hate at any moment—though there are times when I forget my gratitude, my duty, and distrust him in my turn. I see the harpies round that weak, eccentric man, and I bide my time to foil them, for his sake as much as mine.”

“Why all this scheming?—whence the necessity?” asked Eunice.

“Eunice, they shall not have his money—these time-servers, if I can help it,” she cried, with her handsome face, dark and lowering again; “we are his next of kin, and are entitled to it. I scheme for myself, and against them, if you will; but I have a right by birth, and they are only robbers who would step between him and our rights.”

“And this, you—who were once so unselfish and affectionate!”

“Who was not unlike Eunice Worcester; and thought of a life like hers until the rich uncle found a place for her in his home. If he has

made me worse than I was, why, that is his fault, not mine."

"No—not his," denied Eunice; "you must not change to a worldly woman, and lay the fault to him who only wished to make a lady of you. That is not fair."

"Well—I will take all the blame myself; see," she said, with a smile; "how accommodating I can be!"

Damaris strove hard to be agreeable—to win the smiles back to her sister's face; but Eunice was still thoughtful.

"You will change, that is certain, Damaris—nay, you are changed already; but will you be successful in all the scheming that you think is necessary?"

"That is very uncertain, for water is not more unstable than my uncle Harland," answered Damaris, gloomily. "I will do my best; I will fight my hardest, and with all a woman's ingenuity, trusting for the right on my side to turn the balance in our favour."

"Poor uncle!" said Eunice, "the pitiful centre of all this wretched plotting."

"Yes—he is deserving of pity. I pity him

sometimes until I love him, Eunice. And—oh! believe this—that I love him none the less, for despising those who would oust me from my place.”

“And should they oust you from it?”

“I am prepared for that,” said Damaris, quickly. “I have thought of everything.”

“You think too much, and that destroys all happiness,” sighed the younger sister.

“Think too much of myself, you mean.”

“Yes.”

“Wrong, girl, wrong;” cried Damaris, impetuous once more. “I think of you, and of those who have claims upon us both. I strive for the advancement of us all, and the defeat of the strangers who have wormed their way into my uncle’s confidence. Why, if it depended upon myself—”

“It depends upon yourself alone, Damaris,” said Eunice. “I have no ambition, and father and mother—”

“Have in their hearts, let them say what they will. They have a right to rise; and if Mr. Harland leaves me all his money, why we shall rise together—unless—”

She stopped, and looked thoughtfully down

at the carpet; a new thought had arisen to perplex her, and to furrow that white brow. Eunice looked into her face attentively.

“Unless—?” she repeated interrogatively.

“Unless my uncle should couple with his legacy some strange conditions that should make *me* rich and keep you all poor. His is a strange mind, full of petty chicaneries—a mind that is not to be trusted in itself, and may give way at any moment.”

“Damaris, Damaris,” whispered Eunice in her ear, but Damaris was perplexed with this new feature of the future, and took no heed. She did not observe the horror in her sister's face—the horror at her selfish calculations.

“You remember three years since, that he was persuaded to see mother—that I less cautious in my movements—more of a foolish girl and full of hope in the result—persuaded him. After all those years they met, and he was frightened at her. Mother was not at her best, and he was at his worst, and the whole plan was a failure. I believe that he has hated her from that day; he expected tears of gratitude and a thousand thanks for all his mercy towards us, and she reproached him with his want of natural

affection. After that, the interdict upon our meeting—almost upon our correspondence ; his distrust of mother, and his hatred of my father, whom he has never seen. That distrust and hatred may lead to a strange will.”

“Damaris, I wish that you had not come,” cried Eunice, sharply.

Damaris looked up indignantly : she was of a passionate nature, it was evident.

“What did you say ?” she asked.

“I wish that you had not come,” repeated Eunice, “you lower yourself by this eternal plotting—this everlasting suspicion—this reckoning on the chances for and against the life which you begrudge your benefactor.”

“No, no—God forbid that I should envy him a moment’s life !” cried Damaris, wringing her hands ; “it is not that ; you are mistaken in me.”

“It is coming to that ; for you are changing for the worse, and hardening, Damaris—oh ! so rapidly !”

“No, no—only hardening slowly, and trying with all my might to resist the process of ossification,” she said more lightly. “There, I am distressing you, and I haven’t travelled

thus far to do that ; I fled from envy, hatred, and uncharitableness, to meet with peace and love here."

"And brought envy, hatred, and uncharitableness from London with you."

"You must not say that. There, now I am Damaris Worcester !"

She thought herself at her worst when she was Damaris Harland, it was evident. There was a strange yearning to be at peace, to be more natural and less ambitious in this perverted nature still, for she said an instant afterwards—

"If he had not separated us, Eunice, when we were children—if my trainers had been like your own, and uncle Harland had kept me at a distance too—keeping down at the same time the evil that was in me ! There, there, we will not think of this," she added, "we will not talk any more of what is, or what might have been. Tell me about yourself, my dear, and make my heart more light."

Then Damaris Worcester became the sister, fond and true, and it was a pleasant picture of woman's affection, that might have even touched the feelings of Lewis Searle could he have

stepped back upon the scene. Uncle Harland was forgotten for the nonce, and the two girls chattered like birds with a bird-like music in their laughs, which were not unfrequent as the time stole on.

It was Eunice who cut short this happiness by pointing to the little clock upon her mantel-piece.

"I am sorry to remind you that the last train goes in half-an-hour, dear."

"So late!" cried Damaris, starting up. "How my uncle will wonder where I am!"

"You will tell him that you have been to see me?"

"I must, now that Searle has found me out!" said the sister; and the old look upon the handsome face came back.

"I will see you to the station, dear."

"Are you not afraid of these dark country lanes, coming back?"

"Oh! no one would harm me," cried Eunice, confidently.

"No one would have the heart to do so, or the want of heart. A conceited little minx, and vain of her own amiability," said Damaris, laughing; "an amiability which is

catching, too, for I am always the better and brighter for a glimpse of you."

"Then come more frequently."

"Presently I will,—presently, Eunice, together for life!"

"When uncle Harland dies," said Eunice, gloomily.

"No; before that time, possibly," said Damaris; "when I am the mistress of my own grand fortunes, and away from uncle Harland."

"When you are married?" Eunice asked, eagerly.

"Married!" cried Damaris, lightly. "I shall never marry. I am a man hater."

Eunice laughed and shook her head, and then the two went out of the house into the lanes, walking briskly away together, arm-in-arm, and talking of marriage and giving in marriage like two romantic school-girls, each sketching, after awhile, her beau-ideal of what a lover should be, and laughing merrily over the portrait, sprinkling even the beau-ideal with pleasant satire.

"If ever I fall in love," said Eunice, "my hero shall be tall, and staid, and handsome;

a religious man without cant, and a good-looking fellow without affectation,—some one to look up to.”

“Young, of course.”

“I don’t know that I should care for one so very young,” said Eunice, demurely. “I’m too old-fashioned for young men to run after; steady and respectable middle-age will do for me, not being a beauty like this stuck-up sister of mine.”

Then followed the raillery of the two women, the dashing down of the picture that had been set up, till the night seemed rippling over with their musical laughter.

“And your beau, Damaris?”

“Oh! mine,” answered the elder sister. “Well, a young man, of seven feet or thereabouts, with an interesting narrow chest, a pale face, and long hair,—an eccentric man with a mystery—full of fervour and poetry, and with a terrible and desperate hate of all that is mean, and false, and money-loving.”

She had begun lightly enough, but the latter portion of her description she uttered with an intensity of feeling that startled

Eunice, and kept her silent and thoughtful until Damaris spoke again.

“That is the hero who can never love me,” she cried, “for I am mean, and false, and money-loving,—you see that. But, oh! how I should love that man,—at a distance! Conscious of my own inferiority, my utter unworthiness, loving him for his hate, and never letting him know, by a word or a look, what a big secret that affection was. There’s a position for a novel, Eunice! Would not the fashionable young ladies cry over me, if the novel were well worked up? Would not the hero be voted impossible and monstrous?”

“I dare say that he would.”

“And serve him right, too, for such a hero could not exist in this world. The unethereality of the atmosphere would kill the duck!”

Then Eunice and Damaris laughed again; they were laughing when they passed into the little station together. They were full of light and life, with the platform all to themselves, until within two minutes of the time of the train, when a guard turned out of a signal-house with a lantern in his hand, and a

gentleman suddenly sauntered into existence, glanced at the sisters as he passed them in his promenade, started, raised his hat, and exclaimed, in well-bred surprise,—

“Miss Damaris! Miss Harland!”

Damaris's first movement was to become several inches higher, it seemed, she drew herself up so stiffly and haughtily; then she subsided, almost as quickly, into graciousness, recovered from her astonishment, and placed her hand in that of the gentleman's, which had been extended towards her with all the familiarity of an old acquaintance.

“This is an agreeable surprise, indeed,” he said. “I had no idea that you had friends in this neighbourhood.”

“Your mother has been aware of it some time,” Damaris answered. “Eunice,” to her sister, “this is Mr. Courtenay, of whom you have heard me speak; you will allow me to introduce you?”

Then she went formally through the introduction, and Mr. Courtenay raised his hat again, whilst Eunice bowed. It was an odd introduction, in the shadowy station; and Eunice wondered whether she should ever be

able to recognize the gentleman again. She could see that he was a slim, slight young man, of middle height, possessing an incipient moustache by way of adornment to a thin, pale, and somewhat angular face; a fashionably dressed man, whose name was very familiar to her, though she had only met him once before, and that years ago at Westbourne-upon-Sea, when he had not condescended to drop any money into her tambourine upon solicitation. This was Mr. Harland's nephew on the late Mrs. Harland's side, almost a relation, one who had been at college when Eunice was more a favourite with her uncle; Eunice doubted if it were accident that had brought that young man to the small railway station. This could not be Damaris's beau-ideal of manly perfection, but he might be a young man in love with Damaris. She hoped that he was not; for even in the dim light she did not like his looks.

"A very unexpected pleasure, this," he said to Damaris again.

"You have friends about here, Mr. Courtenay?" said Damaris.

"Oh, yes."

"May I inquire their names? My sister is *au fait* with the inhabitants."

"When I say about here," explained Mr. Courtenay, "seven miles from here, at least, and more in the Caterham direction. The Warrens, of Grove House," he added, to Eunice.

"Caterham station would have suited you better, then," said Damaris, lightly.

"Yes; but this train does not stop at Caterham."

"Indeed!"

They were standing with their backs to a great time-table, hung against the wooden partition of the station, and Damaris turned instinctively towards the bill, as though to convince herself of Mr. Courtenay's statement. Then she altered her intention, if she had had such an idea, and said, with a pleasant smile, "What a long walk for you it has been!"

"I am a first-rate walker, and devoted to the country. If I had my will, I would live amongst the Surrey hills, and abjure the City and City life for ever."

"You would soon tire of a country life, Mr. Courtenay," said Damaris.

Then she held out her hand to her sister and said, "Good-bye. The train is coming. I am very glad to hear that you are getting on so well, and so respectably. You will excuse the curiosity that led me to visit you,—it was a friendly and a sisterly one, believe me."

Eunice held her breath in amazement. She mechanically shook her sister by the hand, and made no attempt to kiss her. Damaris, she saw, had her part to play again; the sister had stepped back to her own false world, and slipped on the mask that she wore so easily and well. She felt that here had stepped between them another being of whom Damaris was doubtful, and she accepted the position, though her heart throbbed unpleasantly fast at this duplicity.

"Good-bye, Miss Harland," she even said, and Damaris frowned at her as at one who had rather overdone her part. The train came up, there was a bustle on the platform, a noise of doors opening and shutting, a guard with a mouth plentifully stocked with plums, shouting out an indistinguishable name, a "Good night, Miss Worcester," from

the gentleman, a shriek of the engine, and Eunice left alone upon the platform, shivering with the cold air to which autumn nights are subject.

“Can this be right and honest,” she murmured, looking at the red lights of the receding train; “can it ever come right? Lucky for me,” she added, heartily, “that uncle Harland never made a lady of Eunice!”

She went out of the station, and walked back briskly to her school.

CHAPTER VII.

COURTENAY'S LOVE SUIT.

DAMARIS WORCESTER, as we shall call her to the end of the story, despite her objections to that appellation, entered a first-class carriage, and was followed by Edwin Courtenay. It might have been observed that Damaris had glanced anxiously into each first-class compartment as the train glided past the platform, and had selected the only one containing company in the shape of a white-haired old lady and a little boy.

It would have been strange on the part of Mr. Courtenay to have chosen another carriage, but Damaris frowned again to herself as he took his seat beside her, tossed his hat on the rack above him, and composed himself for conversation. She frowned still more, and looked evidently perplexed when the lady suddenly

rose in nervous trepidation at suddenly discovering her whereabouts, and scuttled out of the train with her small companion, muttering something about the unintelligibility of railway guards, as she retired. Mr. Courtenay passed a lavender kid glove across his face for an instant, and took that opportunity to smile behind it; Damaris was assured. Still, it was a very grave face that confronted her the instant afterwards.

"Shall we close the window, Miss Damaris?" he asked; "the wind will be inconvenient to you, I am afraid."

"The place is stifling—I like fresh air," Damaris answered curtly.

Mr. Courtenay bowed. He had nothing to urge in contradiction to that wish.

The train moved on, and both man and maiden were silent for awhile. The maiden looked thoughtfully at the opposite seat, and the man glanced at Damaris as though to read by her expression of features what she thought of this unlooked-for meeting.

"A curious coincidence," he said at last, "an unexpected pleasure." He had said that on the platform of the station, but he thought it worth

repeating, if only with the object of breaking in upon an objectionable silence.

"Yes, it is curious," answered Damaris. "I question," she added very quickly, "if it be gentlemanly to follow me like this—to track my footsteps in this insidious manner. I question if it be worthy of you, Mr. Courtenay!"

"Miss Harland," he said with animation, "I pray you to believe that I have not intentionally followed you—that this is really a chance meeting."

"Am I to believe that chance directs more than one gentleman to this part of the world to-night, then?"

"You have not met Mr. Ranwick? Surely he has not—"

"I have met Mr. Searle," she said, interrupting him, "and he professes not to have been aware of my visit here also."

"Searle!" exclaimed Courtenay; "yes, that is very strange indeed. Whatever could he want with you—whatever object has led him to spy upon you?"

"To spy upon me! Yes, that is the right phrase."

"But you must believe, Miss Damaris," he

mentioned very nervously her Christian name even with its formal prefix, as though doubtful if he were justified in thus addressing her, "that I had no intention—no object—in encountering you by surprise. Upon my honour, no!"

It was a glib lie of Mr. Edwin Courtenay's, but still he lied like a gentleman, he thought, and Damaris Worcester would believe him. She accepted his denial gracefully at least, and said:

"You have no object in tracking a friend, and I do not think that were it even in your power you would do me any harm."

"Miss Damaris," he said earnestly, "upon my honour, I would rather cut my throat!"

"Not that there is power in anyone to injure me, or that I am doubtful of my own strength, my own capability to fight my own battles," she said proudly. "Mr. Harland, as you know, is not attached to my family, but I shall tell him to-night that I have been to see my sister. Apart from her as I stand, he cannot expect that I have not a little curiosity concerning her and her well-doing."

"He cannot expect you to be unsisterly. He

is an exacting man ; but he will do you justice. Shall I add that—”

“I want no assistance, Mr. Courtenay ; if I cannot plead my cause myself, I will not ask you to second it.”

She was conscious that she had spoken rudely a moment afterwards, for she said in a more mild tone, as though in her heart she feared him : “I have satisfied my curiosity—I have seen my sister, and there’s an end of it and her.”

“Miss Damaris, I will be frank with you,” said Edwin Courtenay, with a sudden exhibition of frankness that made Damaris jump again. “I do not see why we should fence the question. You speak of your sister as an object of curiosity ; but I came down the same country lane with yourselves, and though I had not recognized you then, I could not help remarking to myself, that there were two fond, loving, and happy women a few paces ahead of me in companionship together. I do not know why you seek to present yourself to me as cold and and unsympathetic, when you are all that is good, affectionate, and true.”

“True to the past, which Mr. Harland hates—

I do not acknowledge that. True to my sister Eunice—yes, I am !”

“ I knew it.”

“ There, there, make the worst of that to your uncle, sir, if you will,” said Damaris, defiantly. “ I am tired of this duplicity, and if it please your mother and yourself, why I am in your power. Who knows, if you may not set Mr. Harland against me !”

“ Damaris,” he said—he had dropped the cold prefix to her Christian name at last, “ you know that I would not say a word to Mr. Harland or my mother—that I would not thwart your lightest wish, but rather go to the end of the world to serve it. Why taunt me like this ?—me, who have confessed to you that your beauty has made me your slave, and that I love you with a desperation that drives me mad, whilst you shut out all hope of heaven to me !”

So earnest, then, was Edwin Courtenay—this inflammable stripling whom Damaris had ensnared. All the polite conventionalities of society set aside then, and the lover, with his heart on his sleeve, at Damaris's side, seeking to secure Damaris's gloved hand.

“ No, sir ; I have said that I can never return

your love," cried Damaris; "that I don't believe in it. Why do you revive again the subject that is painful to us both?"

"Because I am a desperate man," he cried, almost furiously; "because you are learning to love another, and are duping me. Damaris, I will not have that!"

"You have no right to dictate to me when I shall love, or whom," said Damaris, still defiant; "what do you mean?"

"Pardon me," said Edwin Courtenay, very humbly now. "I spoke hastily, but then I felt deeply. You have given me hope."

"I have not," was the denial here.

"You have not completely refused me, and that is hope, Damaris. You have told me that there might come a time—a future time—when you might think differently and better of me."

"Did I say so much as that?" gasped Damaris; and her hands were clasped involuntarily together. "Is it possible?"

"Yes, it is possible and—true! You remember twelve months since, when you were with my mother in Milan, that—"

"Ah! I remember. But you are unkind

to seize an advantage and to persecute me when I am defenceless like this. Mr. Courtenay, you are not generous to women."

"I would not have uttered a word to-night, but that I am tortured with jealousy."

"Of whom?"

"Of Ranwick,—my fellow-clerk, my uncle's favourite,—the man who has stepped in so strangely to weaken my chances, as well as yours. He loves you, Damaris."

"'Tis false."

"And it is duping me—pardon the phrase again—to let him love you, or to love him in return, and not apprise me of the state of your feelings towards him."

"Let me tell you now, that I can never marry you," said Damaris; "that I will regard you as a friend for ever, the best of friends, if you will not persecute me thus."

She looked at him entreatingly, but he was not a merciful man. He had been told once that there might come a time when she could love him; he had been led on to this, or he had led her on to confess as much, in order to escape his importunity, and he held

her fast to that promise so long as she confessed that she was heart-free.

"I will not persecute you, Damaris," he said slowly. "I only ask you, at all times, for your confidence. Tell me that you love another: give me his name, and confess that it will be yours some day, and I will crush every hope of you that I have in my heart."

Damaris turned towards him, then paused; and Edwin Courtenay glanced nervously towards her. Was she about to confess an attachment to some one—to take him at his word, and end the love and ambition with which his mind was full? He changed colour as he gazed at her.

"Well," he said, "you love, then?"

"No; I do not," was the deliberate reply.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated. "I am free for awhile to build my castle in the air. Damaris, I must hope still, until the castle falls."

"Did you not promise never to speak of love to me again?"

"Until you changed towards me; and I have fancied that there is a change."

"Shall I swear to you that I will never marry?"

“No—don’t say that,” he answered quickly.

They were silent for awhile again; then Edwin Courtenay, exulting in the advantage that he had gained that evening—in his prisoner, as it were, that accompanied him to London, and could not fly away—went on mercilessly. A deep young fellow in many things was Mr. Courtenay, but in matters of courtship somewhat of a bungler. He had great faith in a constant persistence of his suit; he had a hundred examples of antiquity and history to endorse his plan as a good and blameless one, but he was no great judge of character, and he could not believe that Damaris was different to other women.

He went on, then; and there was a strange pleading in his love suit, and strange arguments to back it. He was vain of his own powers and of himself, and he thought that the prize would be his in good time.

“To think that a match that would make everyone happy depends solely upon you—that with you rests all the opposition,” he said; “even my proud aristocratic mother wishes it.”

“Not for the sake of the new daughter that she would secure,” said Damaris, scornfully.

"Granted for the sake of the heiress that my uncle may make of you," he said, with his old false frankness predominant again, "for she is a woman of the world, and sees the advantage of our union. It would draw me nearer to my uncle—it would draw you closer to my mother—and there would be no doubts and anxieties as to the brightness of our future. I am sure that uncle Harland wishes it."

"I will have no more of this," said Damaris, irritably. "You cannot overcome me with your talk of the worldly advantages that are before me—that but disgusts me, sir."

"Ah! you are not a worldly woman like my mother—and it was my mother pleading for me then. Pardon me—I have offended you."

"You set my heart against you—it hardens whilst you speak. Why have you not the common sense to be silent?" she demanded.

"I may hope on, then?" he said, persuasively; "hope till I feel assured, or you assure me, that all hope is over?"

"Hope *is* over."

"Not whilst you are disengaged," he said.

"And you will never speak like this to me again? There, I promise that I will confess

when my heart pleads for you, Courtenay, if *you* will promise not to talk to me like this; that I will tell you when every chance is over for you—when the last chance dies away. Is that fair?”

He might have seen that every chance was over with him then, had he been not blinded by his passion, but he would not see it. He might have read the eagerness of the woman to evade his attentions, and let his love die out for ever in that railway carriage; but he was a vain man, and looked forward sanguinely.

“Yes; it is fair. It is a compact.”

The train stopped at the next station, and Damaris was glad to see a stranger enter, although Edwin Courtenay cursed the intruder with all the natural bitterness of his disposition. He attempted to discourse of indifferent topics for the remainder of the journey, but Damaris did not second his endeavours, and was inclined to subside into herself, and away from him. He became more personal and friendly, and aroused a fleeting interest. He warned her of her uncle's head-man—of that Mr. Searle whom she had met that night; he told her of his own distrust, and strengthened hers; albeit whom

he distrusted was a matter of little consequence, for she knew that he had no faith in any living thing, except a wild faith in her future love for him. He spoke of his uncle, and of his eccentricities; would have even offered her advice concerning the way to humour the latter—he, who had never won a high place in his uncle's favour, despite the future partnership promised him!—had she not sharply set her interdict upon that counsel. Lastly, he spoke of Matthew Ranwick, and here Damaris listened again attentively, and hazarded a few comments, although he sketched his friend in colours that were black enough. He confessed to an attachment for young Ranwick, and to a knowledge of his many faults, patent enough to all who knew the man. Ranwick was anxious to rise in the world—by honest means, if possible, but by any means if honesty of conduct were in the way of his advancement, he implied. A great schemer, Matthew Ranwick—pushing his way upwards with a force that cleared the road for him, and winning upon many by his specious ways, his fair, false smiles, his skin-deep amiability.

“That is the man of whom you should be

most careful," he said, "for he will rob you of our uncle's love—your uncle's money, perhaps—before you are aware."

"Yes, he is dangerous," assented Damaris, "and must not be made an enemy of, if we can help it."

He liked that plural "we;" his face brightened at it; but Damaris was not aware that she had uttered it.

"If we could but—" he began, then stopped.

Damaris was coldly, steadily surveying him, and the searching glance of those dark eyes he could not meet. He was about to imply too much—to imply that he was capable of suggesting a dishonourable course of action in order to defeat Matthew Ranwick—to lower himself for ever in the estimation of her who might love him in good time. He went on with easy grace.

"If we could but learn what he thinks of you and me, and whether he envies us that share in Mr. Harland's fortune to which by birth we are entitled."

"Yes—by birth," murmured Damaris.

They were silent the rest of the way to the

London Bridge terminus ; and on the platform, and in the crowd there, Damaris extended her hand towards him.

“Good night,” she said.

“But you are going—”

“Home alone, and in the first cab that I can find,” she said decisively, and Mr. Edwin Courtenay urged no further protest against this determination.

He wished her good night, placed her in the cab by the side of the platform, directed the cabman where to drive his fare, and even defrayed the expenses of the journey beforehand, to Damaris's annoyance, although she smiled spasmodically, and said “Thank you” as she was driven away.

Mr. Courtenay would have been considerably startled could he have perceived the expression on the face of the woman he loved the instant after the cab had left the terminus.

“If I were only a man,” cried Damaris, with her hands clenched, and the lightning flashing in her eyes again, “to cope with all these—to meet them on their own ground, with the strength and courage of a man to face them

all! Shall I fight through it, or shall I go mad!"

One might have fancied that the latter alternative was the more probable, to have seen Damaris Worcester on that homeward journey.

END OF VOL. I.



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